



# The Backyard Initiative: Strengthening Community Health Improvement

The Backyard Initiative is a dynamic partnership between Allina Hospitals & Clinics and its neighbors to improve health and health care in the seven communities immediately surrounding Allina Commons, Abbott Northwestern Hospital and the Phillips Eye Institute. The Backyard Initiative supports efforts to strengthen health by empowering residents to develop a community care-giving system—a system that helps residents draw upon their own knowledge, skills, and cultural values to care for themselves, their families, and their neighbors.

Research shows that social conditions – including isolation and a lack of social support – have a profound impact on our health. The Backyard Initiative connects residents and health care institutions to address these challenges together. By partnering the expertise and resources of health care institutions with the wisdom and experience of residents, The Backyard Initiative is exploring a cutting-edge, new dimension to a health care system that will promote health in addition to treating sickness.

In 2008, Allina Hospitals & Clinics started a partnership with the Cultural Wellness Center, a

community nonprofit organization in South Minneapolis, to facilitate the community engagement process for The Backyard Initiative. The Cultural Wellness Center has a long history of engaging community residents to improve health through self-study, surfacing and producing knowledge, cross-cultural knowledge exchange, and relationship building. Early in the process, the Cultural Wellness Center led a process that engaged residents in developing a definition of health, a definition that became the foundation for The Backyard Initiative:

## BYI Definition of Health

**Health** is a state of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. It is not only the absence of infirmity and disease.

**Health** is the state of balance, harmony, and connectedness within and between many systems – the body, the family, the community, the environment, and culture. It cannot be seen only in an individual context.

**Health** is an active state of being; people must be active participants to be healthy. It cannot be achieved by being passive.



## The Community Care Giving System

The residents of The Backyard Initiative are developing a community care-giving system that functions alongside the health care system. A community care-giving system is composed of neighbors supporting, sharing, teaching, and guiding each other: in watching each other's children, in learning skills from each other, in creating businesses together, in gardening and cooking together, in sharing rides to the grocery store and doctor's office, in sharing stories in support groups, in sharing cultural resources and knowledge, and in countless other ways. The Backyard Initiative participants believe that creating space and opportunities for residents to interact with each other, get to know each other, and access each other's knowledge and experience, will strengthen the relationships needed to create healthier people and a healthier community.

## Partners in the Backyard Initiative

**Allina Hospitals & Clinics:** As a mission-driven organization, Allina Hospitals & Clinics strives to provide exceptional health care and to improve the health of the communities it serves. The Backyard Initiative is a key program of Allina's Center for Healthcare Innovation, which researches new care models to transform health and health care and seeks collaborative partnerships as it fosters innovative approaches to providing care.

**Cultural Wellness Center:** is a non-profit, community-based organization dedicated to developing cultural approaches for positively impacting health and health care, economic development, and community building.

**Hope Community:** A Phillips community development organization committed to deep community engagement. Hope Community led the process of engaging non-profit organizations in the Backyard.

"The Backyard Initiative is about people empowering themselves to change the conditions in their own community. This project is driven by community—they have defined what constitutes a healthy life and initiated projects to create that life, rather than experts defining and solving problems for them. This is why Allina is committed to community development—through deep partnerships and honest dialogue, we can collaboratively explore innovative solutions to some of our toughest health and quality of life challenges."

~ Marcus Thygeson,  
President, Center for Healthcare Innovation  
Allina Hospitals & Clinics



Mahamed Cali, Cara Carlson, Benjamin Holquist, Laura Barnes

## Assessment Process

After the definition of health was established, an assessment team was formed to create a picture of the current state of health and well-being of the residents in the Backyard, engage a broad network of residents in the process, and inform and plan the next steps for The Backyard Initiative. The assessment team included community residents, staff from Allina, the CWC, and Wilder Research. Through 21 Listening Circles and 677 face-to-face, walk-around interviews, three themes began to emerge:

**The Power of Interconnectedness.** Each dimension of health named in the community definition of health is dependent on the others; one dimension of health cannot be understood or addressed in isolation.

**The Power of Relationships.** People know that they need exercise and healthy food, plenty of rest and occasional check-ups to be healthy, but their relationships are crucial to whether they consistently act on that knowledge. Developing healthy relationships between community residents and health care providers is a powerful factor for improving community health outcomes.

**The Power of Knowledge and Creativity.** Cultural knowledge, information exchange between patients and health practitioners, and community dialogue can be resources for health.

Community is not a theoretical idea—it's people. It's about people, not theoretical 'residents.' Community is valued highly and we're going to be working on it and working on it. Our decisions will have to reflect the community."

~ Community Member

The question at the time that we began the work to build a partnership was, "What kind of a relationship exists between Allina and residents in the surrounding community?" I am still able to feel the strong spirit of residents in those first meetings in 2008 as they described the relationship between themselves and institutions, including Allina, as one of victim and perpetrator. They spoke of being denied quality services, being denied a place at the table when decisions were made about the distributions of resources. After two and one half years of working together, the distrust is now replaced by a deepening respect and a sense of shared strength and responsibility. Members of the partnership are carrying forward great knowledge and skill in forming and deepening relationships between people across diverse experiences. I hear residents imagining collective planning with Allina to bring in resources which will be developed together. The residents see Allina Hospitals & Clinics as a sincere partner and as an anchor for their groundbreaking community driven strategy to build a community care system. Allina's upfront financial commitment and mode of operating with the community in the Backyard Initiative is a model for others to follow who, like Allina, want to find effective solutions to major community challenges.

Atum Azzahir  
Executive Director, Cultural Wellness Center



The "Backyard" includes the neighborhoods of Ventura Village, Phillips West, Midtown Phillips, East Phillips, Central, Powderhorn Park and Corcoran, The boundaries are Interstate 94, Interstate 35W and Hiawatha Avenue.

# What's Happening in the Backyard

## Infrastructure for Community Engagement and Ownership

BYI participants have discussed how a healthy community requires residents who have a sense of ownership in the community, know the history and stories of residents, and who participate together in making decisions for the benefit of the community. In 2010, the Backyard Initiative efforts were centered on creating the infrastructure that would support these community characteristics.

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM SUMMER 2010 - PRESENT

#### Developed the role of the Citizen Health Action Teams (CHATs)

Backyard residents developed their ideas into implementable projects for improving health. Each CHAT member learned about working as part of a team, about taking leadership and following leadership, about working for the whole community, not just for their CHAT project. The CHATs also outlined a process for presenting to the Commission on Health that was respectful and supportive.

#### Established a Community Commission on Health (First Official Meeting in February 2010)

The membership was decided, the process for decision-making, the standards for operating, a process for supporting and funding the CHAT projects were all discussed and agreed upon. City officials from the Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development and the Department of Health and Family Support gave presentations and the Commissioners gained more understanding of the state of the community and the resources in the community.

#### Established the Backyard Initiative CRB – Community Resource Body (First meeting May 6, 2011)

The CRB or Community Resource Body is made up of leading healthcare, economic and community development professionals who will work in partnership with the Backyard Initiative Community's Commission on Health to link and generate knowledge, relationships, and resources to sustain the work of Backyard residents and improve the long-term health of the community.

## CHAT Descriptions

### ANCHOR FAMILIES

is establishing an "anchor family" on each block to facilitate community gatherings, celebrations and rituals among neighbors. These connections will result in neighbors becoming "more like relatives than strangers" to one another.

### A PARTNERSHIP OF DIABETICS (A-POD)

works to support diabetes self-management and recovery through networks of family, social and community based resources that effectively complement the work of health care providers.

### ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

carries out the assessment, evaluation, and research needs of the Commission. They ensure that the CHAT projects and other activities of the BYI are consistent with the vision and mission of the BYI, and oversee the research process of the Backyard Initiative.

### COMMUNICATIONS / MEDIA

is working to lessen or eliminate the divide between people who have information and those who don't so that everyone has the opportunity to be engaged in a healthy community.

### DAKOTA LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

is concentrated on keeping Dakota language and life ways alive and vibrant in the Dakota community.

### DID YOU KNOW?

is working to build capacity through the traditional block club system to get to know our neighbors and build relationships through which we can deliver information and support.

### GROWING THE BACKYARD

is finding ways to support healthy eating though accessibility to healthy foods and educating about healthy practices across cultures.

### GURI NABAD

is working with Somali families to understand and address the causes of childhood asthma within the Somali community.

### LATINO/A ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BEGINS AT HOME

is looking at the impact of environment on the health of residents in the Backyard. Latinas help to clean each others' homes using environmentally safe products.

### OUT IN THE BACKYARD

is working to connect individuals from all cultures who are LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) to one another and with the resources they need to be healthy and safe.



### PROJECT SELF - IMMIGRANT HEALTH

is bringing together youth, elders and families in healthy living and artistic expression through poetry, open mic performances, workshops and community dialogue.

### REBIRTHING COMMUNITY

is creating a "Communities of Light" cooperative that will make and sell solar lanterns. Through intergenerational workshops, neighborhood residents will make lanterns while learning about cooperatives, sustainable lifestyle and energy self-sufficiency.

### SOMALI WOMEN'S HEALTH SUPPORT

is connecting Somali women together who have children in the justice system in order to reduce isolation and social stigma, facilitating a better understanding of how the justice system works, and helping to prevent other children in the community from entering the justice system.

## Backyard Organizational Engagement and Inventory 2011

Hope Community agreed to work with Allina to bring organizational leaders back together. Small listening sessions, rather than a large meeting, were held to encourage dialogue in response to a Backyard update. In spring 2010, several sessions with organizational leaders brought together 31 people from 28 organizations located in the Backyard – mostly from community non-profits, as well as clinics, two insurance providers, government providers, and a few others.

The listening sessions elicited several themes. The groups' responses were very positive about the Definition of Health developed by residents and the work of the CHATs. In addition, participants described significant organizational challenges

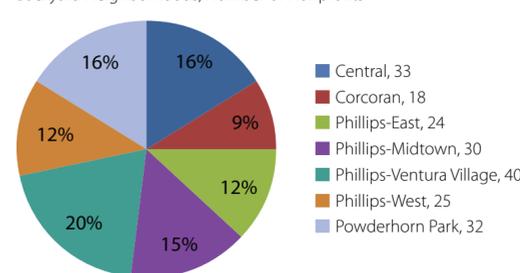
Many said that current funding realities and increasing demand make their work difficult, and make it challenging to connect effectively with other organizations or respond to new initiatives. Immediate demand can be overwhelming, and strategies for long-term change difficult to fund. Many raised the issue of "silos," noting that organizations are isolated from each other. Isolation reduces the ability to know about other organizations and opportunities, and often doesn't allow the space to build the trust needed to address issues.

Still, there was overwhelming agreement that building organizational relationships and connections is a key interest and priority for organizations in the Backyard. Willingness to continue involvement, if it is productive and action-focused, was almost universal.

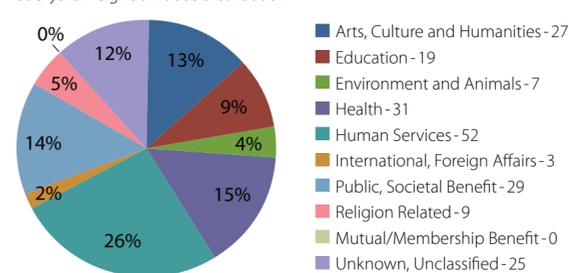
Hope Community also worked with Creative Community Builders (CCB) on a related project, an inventory of non-profit organizations in the Backyard. The project was informed by the interest of residents in understanding more about the landscape of organizations in the Backyard. Through an online database, CCB identified non-profits in the zip codes surrounding the Backyard, and then in the Backyard area: the four Phillips neighborhoods, Central, Corcoran and Powderhorn Park in South Minneapolis. After checking to confirm active organizations, CCB reviewed websites for additional information.

There are 202 organizations in the Backyard, with the majority focused on human services, health, public/social benefit, and arts/culture. The focus of a possible next stage of information gathering will be developed with input from residents and other stakeholders.

Backyard Neighborhoods, Number of Nonprofits



Backyard Neighborhoods Distribution



Community residents including, Lee Younger, Steven Washington, Angelica Buenioastro, Onayemi Ogunkoye

## What We are Learning

### Each Partner Brings Different Assets.

The Backyard Initiative mines the assets and experiences of all partners to gain deeper knowledge about health and health care in "The Backyard," which creates the conditions necessary for "community care systems" and clinical care systems to work efficiently and effectively with each other.

**Active Participation is Necessary.** The active participation of residents, community organizations, and health care providers is critical to the success of The Backyard Initiative. By recognizing this interdependence in achieving the shared goal of better health and health care in The Backyard, we're also learning the necessity of developing deep, active partnerships that can sustain the work as it scales up.



Jennifer Bandickson, Sheldon Noel, Laurie Harper

## Principles of Citizen Health Action Teams (CHATs)

1. CHATs continually engage and organize people to contribute their concerns and ideas, to find common interests, to build relationships. They grow participation.
2. CHATs are creative; they surface new ideas, new knowledge.
3. CHATs make connections and do research to connect with existing resources.
4. CHATs are action teams – they plan and implement actions which improve health.
5. CHATs build capacity in the members of the CHAT and in people in the community in the implementation of their project.
6. CHATs build leadership. In their process, they draw out the talents and skills of CHAT members, and build on their experience and culture.
7. CHATs build community in the planning process and the implementation of their project. Building community contributes to health; building community is both the process and the product.





# It Takes a Community...Join Us!

## Mental Health Focus

Over the past few months, community residents participating in the Backyard Initiative looked at the health of the community through statistics, pictures and stories. Through discussion, “mental health” was identified as one focus for their work to improve the health of all residents.

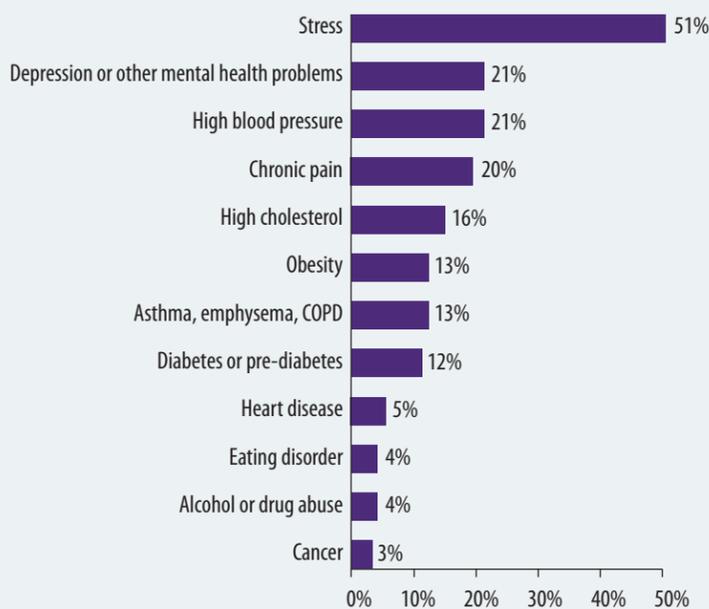
Community members have named many different aspects of mental health, such as stress, depression, and chemical dependency as having a significant impact on overall health. In the community health assessment conducted in 2009, the top health conditions that residents reported experiencing in the last five years were stress (51%), depression (21%), and high blood pressure (21%).

At the end of April the CHAT members

discussed how each of their projects is addressing mental health and what mental health means to them. People listed the indicators of not being mentally healthy as stress, anxiety, anger, lack of trust, sadness, apathy, hopelessness, helplessness, fear, grief, sense of loss, and feeling isolated.

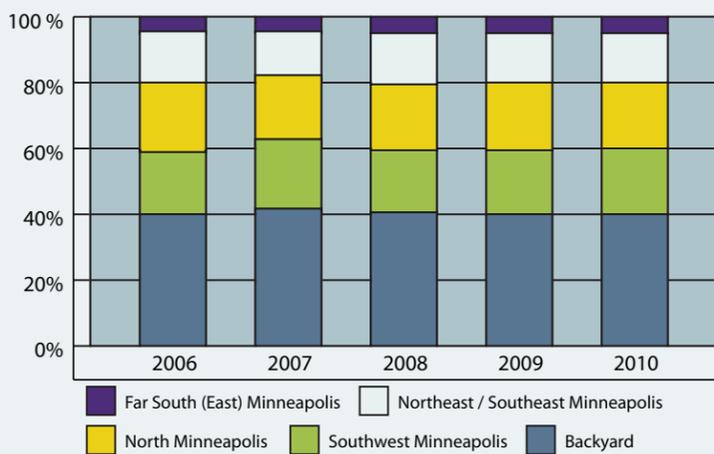
CHAT members reported to each other what their conclusions were and what emerged from the discussion was a picture of a healthy community. Everyone affirmed that a healthy community is what it takes for people to be mentally healthy. The most frequent word linked to mental health was connection – people need connection to each other, to their heritage and culture, to something bigger than themselves.

Which, if any, of the following conditions have you experienced in the past five years or are you currently experiencing?



Health conditions reported by Backyard residents in 2009

Psychiatry Inpatient Discharges by Percent



Between 2006 and 2009, Backyard residents have made up to 40 percent of total number of patients in psychiatric care.

## Join Us!

Residents of the Backyard neighborhoods have formed Citizen Health Action Teams (CHATs), each with a different focus for maintaining and improving health. The CHATs are looking for new members, both to help plan and to implement their health strategies. If you want to work together with your neighbors, please contact the Cultural Wellness Center for the meeting times of the CHATs and other BYI events.

And if you have a great idea for improving health, you can recruit your neighbors and form a new CHAT.

Call the Cultural Wellness Center at 612-721-5745, or visit us at 1527 East Lake in the Franklin Bank Building on the corner of Lake Street and Bloomington Ave.

## Updates and Invitations from some of the Citizen Health Action Teams (CHATs)

### ANCHOR FAMILIES

We have recently welcomed three new households on the Powderhorn Anchor Family Block. We encourage everyone to participate in National Night Out in August!

### A PARTNERSHIP OF DIABETICS (A-POD)

We have secured a space in Phillips Community Center and held our first group in the facility. We have now achieved, through the support of Allina and the Backyard Initiative, the capacity to begin expanding our A-POD groups to handle many more people through our work. We are working on the capacity to ensure that people are accommodated in a manner that meets the expectations of our participants. Construction on the Fitness Center should be completed by August. Join us for an Open House as soon as it's done.

### DID YOU KNOW?

We held a spring reunion event encouraging block clubs to have a special event in the month of May, and 16 block clubs held such an event.

### GROWING THE BACKYARD

We have recruited six participant families and developed a unique Food Systems Navigator position. The Navigator addresses people's cultural nutritional needs and barriers to accessible food. This position can be replicated in other diverse neighborhoods. We will be hosting community dinners/dialogues for stakeholders and people who are interested in food accessibility.

### OUT IN THE BACKYARD

We have contacted more than 180 persons who are interested in participating in the CHAT's activities. A sub-group is conducting community outreach. Small gatherings are being organized to discuss resources. Development of a website has begun. Watch for our dynamic, community oriented website ([outinthebackyard.org](http://outinthebackyard.org)). The goal of the site is to connect people. All future events will be posted there and on Facebook.

### REBIRTHING COMMUNITY

We have a prototype solar generator that is functioning and working today. We are continuing to research alternative energy and money saving sustainability for people's homes. We featured a solar power generator that powered six lights at the May Day Parade. 85 individuals and 20 families have already participated in over 20 workshops. Watch for and be aware of upcoming solar energy presentations. This group is looking at the impact of environment on the health of residents in the Backyard.



*"In the years I've spent on this planet, this is probably the best use of my time. I've never seen so many diverse people sitting around a table to represent community. This has not existed for a long time."*

~ Community Member

## Kudos to...

- All the community members who participated in the Backyard Initiative
- Portico Healthnet
- Cultural Wellness Center
- Rainbow Research
- Allina Hospitals & Clinics
- LISC Twin Cities
- Hope Community
- Fourth Sector Consulting
- S & S Consultants

For more information, visit: [www.allina.com/backyard](http://www.allina.com/backyard)

email us at [backyard@allina.com](mailto:backyard@allina.com),

or contact the Cultural Wellness Center  
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