

# Huntington County Health Department



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Boosting Core Public Health Services Paying Off for Families, Local Agencies**

HUNTINGTON, Ind. (March 19, 2024) – Health First Indiana funding is making a big impact in Huntington County.

The Huntington County Health Department expects to receive up to \$1 million over two years through the new state program. This money is already being distributed to local agencies to bolster core public health services in Huntington County. Its impact has been immediately apparent.

Early childhood services, education and families have been the Health Department's priority with these new funds. So has boosting countywide transportation services to help residents keep doctors' appointments and connect more easily with health services and care.

"I want people to know this all connects to public health," said Dr. Matt Pflieger, Huntington County Public Health Officer. "There are a lot of good things happening here in the community."

#### **Transportation Services**

Serving the transportation needs of Huntington County residents through Huntington Area Transportation, the **Council on Aging** received \$100,000 to hire additional drivers, offer weekend routes, add limited same-day scheduling and increase its capacity for medical trips. Recently, Dr. Pflieger said that transportation was the top issue limiting access to health services in Huntington County.

"With the anticipation of these funds, we instituted some major changes to our HAT program on January 1, 2024," Executive Director Chris Karlin said. "Looking at the statistics, these changes are working and we are learning each day how to better enhance our services."

While it started as senior transportation more than 25 years ago, HAT has branched out to offer public transportation for anyone needing a ride.

Overall, HAT provided 352 additional rides in January 2024 compared to the same month one year ago. Work trips increased from 1,247 to 1,498, and personal trips went from 272 to 306. Medical trips saw a big jump from 461 to 609, or 32.1 percent.

“By providing more rides to medical appointments, hopefully people will take more preventative appointments, which are less expensive than trips to the emergency room,” Karlin said.

## **Education**

The **Huntington County Community School Corporation’s School Health Liaison program** received \$660,000 that has been funneled toward health screenings, immunizations, staff wellness and increasing healthy behaviors among students.

With the Health Department’s support, HCCSC has been able to:

- **Fund a new Nurse Coordinator position.** One of the nurse coordinator's primary responsibilities is to ensure every student has the opportunity to stay up to date with immunizations, and the school district is closer than ever to its goal of a 100 percent immunization rate.
- **Add afterschool programming at the elementary, middle and high school levels.** Students benefit in many ways from activities that build new skills and connect them with caring and involved teachers.
- **Boost staff wellness.** Staff wellness coordinators have been introduced at the high school, Lincoln Elementary and Salamonie Elementary. HCCSC aims to have coordinators at every school by the 2024-25 school year.
- **Provide additional professional development for counselors, nurses and clinic assistants.** Training and ongoing education through the American Counselors Association, Indiana Association of School Nurse Training and Indiana School Health Network Conference create a healthier and safer environment for students.
- **Hire a part-time advocate for Spanish-speaking families.**

“Huntington is a safer and healthier place for students to grow and learn because of the work and leadership of the Huntington County Health Department,” School Health Liaison Megan Friesen said.

The **Boys and Girls Club of Huntington County** received \$20,500 in Health First Indiana from the local Health Department. Those dollars will be used to teach students life skills, boost their self-esteem, and help them resist pressure to try drugs or alcohol.

“Empowering kids to practice these scenarios of what to do if they get caught in these situations, teaching them how to keep from getting put into those situations and building confidence are all keys to keeping students from going on this path,” Boys and Girls Club CEO Mandy Reber said.

## **Early Childhood and Family Services**

The **Indiana Family Care Center** received \$15,000 for its parenting classes and one-on-one mentoring sessions. The center’s work focuses on helping parents strengthen their parenting skills, meeting families’ immediate needs and setting them up for long-term success, Executive Director Michelle Crone said.

The center regularly hears from parents who need assistance with food, diapers, pull-ups, baby wipes and similar items. Meeting families’ physical needs is often the first step in supporting their mental health and emotional well-being.

Crone said that the Health First Indiana Funding has been a blessing to the Family Care Center and the community members it serves. The mentorships and relationships being built with parents and families are having a large impact.

“We are seeing big advancement within families,” she said. “Cycles are being broken. Families are being formed and put back together. Parents are seeing the changes, and they are excited.”

**United with Love of Huntington County** (formerly Love INC) received \$24,000, which it is using to expand the reach of its food pantry and family services into rural areas of the county. According to Executive Director Erin Didion, a new mobile access unit will launch in the coming months to reach county residents who live in “food deserts” or who have limited access to transportation.

The mobile access unit will make a big difference for children, families and seniors who otherwise would go underserved because they lack reliable transportation to visit one of the traditional food pantries in Huntington County.

“Our mission with the mobile access unit is twofold,” Didion said. First, we will fill the nutrition gaps in the county by increasing access to good nutrition, and second, we will reduce financial hardship by encouraging our neighbors to reallocate the funds they would have spent on those food items to other necessary expenses like housing and utilities.”

**Pathfinder’s Early Childhood Center** received \$25,000 in support from the Huntington County Health Department. These dollars are being used to support children’s health and wellness in several ways, from providing regular screenings to maintaining immunization records through Indiana’s Children and Hoosier Immunization Registry Program (CHIRP).

“The (Health Department’s) nurse and health specialist have helped us with monthly lead testing, distributing and supplying flu vaccines, and signing up and getting CHIRP up and running so that we are able to keep up with children’s files,” Interim Director Jenna Wilkinson said.

She said that children enrolled at Pathfinder’s Early Childhood Center also receive vision and hearing screenings through the Health Department’s support.

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