

History of the Foundation for Healthy Communities

The Foundation for Healthy Communities was established by the Ohio Hospital Association (OHA) in 1994 as a catalyst to encourage and help Ohio hospitals in their missions to promote good health in the communities they serve. Started with an endowment of approximately \$2 million, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization with OHA as the sole member of the foundation. OHA represents more than 177 hospitals and 40 health systems with more than 230,000 employees throughout Ohio.

Ohio hospitals provided the funds for OHA to create the foundation from two main sources. The first source was a successful lawsuit OHA had brought against the State of Ohio over budget cuts to Medicaid. Some Ohio hospitals agreed to let OHA keep their prorated share of the proceeds of that lawsuit for the formation of a foundation. The second source was contributions some hospitals made in appreciation of OHA's work for the continued operation and expansion of the Hospital Care Assurance Program.

The foundation's mission is to promote healthy communities and healthy lifestyles by providing support for hospitals and health systems' programs aimed at health education and prevention. The corresponding vision statement, as revised in 2006, is, *"The Foundation for Healthy Communities advances good health for all Ohioans. We initiate health improvement and education by engaging partners, promoting proven strategies and advocating for wellness in our communities."*

The foundation's board of directors consists of 10 Ohio hospital executives, two community representatives and the president and CEO of OHA. The foundation board provides strategic direction and financial oversight. The board also makes decisions on when and for what purpose to issue grants from foundation funds and subsequently awards grants that best meet the announced focus for each grant cycle.

Grants totaling around \$100,000 are awarded annually; with each grant cycle usually producing four to six successful applicants. Since its inception, the foundation has funded 124 projects for nearly \$1.5 million. The foundation has also administered millions of dollars in other state and federal grants to Ohio hospitals from tobacco settlement funds and other sources.

Foundation staff was restructured in 2008 to add a full-time grants manager in addition to support provided by various OHA staff as needed, with oversight from the OHA vice president, public affairs.

Throughout its first decade, the foundation funded innovative projects aimed at promoting health and wellness and tackling broader societal issues of violence, teen pregnancy, child abuse, lack of access to care and aging. The foundation encouraged collaboration among health care providers and other organizations to improve communities'

overall health status. Projects funded included community health needs assessments, primary and dental care clinics, youth tobacco use prevention, childhood immunization, child abuse prevention, teen pregnancy, osteoporosis education, end-of-life care, physical fitness and prescription assistance.

Beginning in 2004 – long before workplace wellness initiatives had gained their current prominence – the foundation began focusing its resources toward assisting hospitals to serve as role models of healthy workplaces. The foundation’s “*Hospitals as the Healthiest Workplaces in Ohio!*” grants provided three years of matching funds to hospitals that encouraged employee participation in wellness programs.

Lessons learned from those grants have been shared in several statewide forums for employers seeking strategies to improve workforce wellness and reduce employee health care costs. With a \$500,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Health and also with the foundation’s own funds, the workplace wellness focus was expanded beginning in 2006 to encourage hospitals to assist other local employers in creating healthier workforces.

The foundation continues to build on its grant-making and grant-administering success. In 2007, the foundation created a new annual award for Ohio hospitals, the David Hendershot Rural Health Promotion Award, honoring the memory of a long-time OHA field director who died in 2006. In the past several years, grantees of the foundation have shared the successes and challenges of their grant-funded work with presentations to hospital colleagues at the OHA Annual Meeting. Hospital staffs across Ohio receive the foundation’s bimonthly newsletter, *Healthy Communities*, which tracks local, regional and national initiatives to promote good health and links readers with information and resources to replicate successful programs.

At the foundation’s request, the OHA Board of Trustees issued a challenge to every Ohio hospital to commit in 2008 to become a Fit-Friendly Company, as recognized by the American Heart Association. More than 70 hospitals and five health systems returned a pledge to become fit-friendly, and 58 hospitals and OHA had achieved recognition as Fit-Friendly Companies after submitting applications in 2008.

In recent years, the foundation board of directors has served as a sounding board for OHA staff on legislative issues related to health promotion and wellness, making recommendations for policy positions to the OHA Board of Trustees.

Now in its second decade, the foundation is committed to move beyond its grant-making and grant-administering roles and grow more fully into its vision statement. While continuing to engage partners for health improvement, the foundation is working to create new opportunities to promote lessons learned from the work of its hospital grantees and to explore new avenues to help Ohio hospitals advocate for healthy communities.