

**We Walk in North Hamilton (We Walk)**  
**North Hamilton Family Alliance, Inc**  
*Submitted to the Minnesota Health Foundation*  
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

An elderly woman is trapped inside her home, stricken by debilitating diabetes and heart disease. A young mother's high blood pressure is out of control, isolated and alone without access to insurance, or exercise facilities. A child stares at the TV and glances out the window at the glass on the sidewalk, forbidden to go outside alone after school. The North Hamilton Family Alliance (NHFA) is all too familiar with how poverty, low levels of education, poor nutritional habits, and sedentary lifestyles endanger the health of our community.

Given the dire health situation of low-income families in North Hamilton, we are seeking \$175,000 for the continued support of We Walk in North Hamilton (We Walk), a program created to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities by reducing health risk factors to build a fitter, healthier North Hamilton. The purpose of this request is to sustain the efforts of We Walk, which provides ongoing fitness and wellness programs for low-income North Hamilton, and to facilitate the coordination of city resources aimed at improving the wellness of city residents.

In our first two years, We Walk Health Initiative has built an array of community health and fitness assets in one of the poorest cities in the nation. Through exercise, community health and wellness workshops, and training community members as fitness trainers, combined with the formation of the We Walk Coalition focusing on a systems building approach to achieving health and wellness in North Hamilton, we are working to address racial and ethnic health inequities in our city.

We envision a city where disparities in health status are no longer problems tied to economic status and ethnicity, and where, through education about healthy lifestyle changes, free fitness activities, and nutritional information, we can improve the overall health and well-being of program participants. By modeling a systems-building approach that involves community members, health providers, the government, private industry, social service providers, hospitals, and research institutions, we hope to not only engender change within North Hamilton, but to have the potential to alleviate minority health disparities in our nation.

**RELEVANCE OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

The lives of our clients, and ultimately the community we serve, are inextricably linked to their poor overall health and well-being. Improving the health of our urban neighborhoods will directly impact the fiscal health of the city, and lead to longer, more productive lives for its citizens. According to the U.S. Task Force on Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the most effective interventions available to clinicians for reducing incidence of disease and disability in the United States are those that address the personal health practices of patients.

By addressing risk factors such as lack of exercise, substance abuse and poor nutrition, half of all premature death and the causes of chronic disability could be prevented. Reducing health risks also translates into significant insurance cost savings, increased productivity and job satisfaction, and decreased sick time, improving the fiscal health and solvency of our communities. Risk reduction activities, such as better nutrition, improving fitness, weight management, and managing blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels reduce financial costs and health risk factors while enhancing overall health.

The community we serve, North Hamilton's African American, Hispanic, and multi-racial residents in the urban center of the city, experiences a disproportionate amount of poverty and related health problems. In 2000, close to 45 percent of North Hamilton households earned less than \$25,000 per year, and over a quarter of residents age 25 and older had not graduated from high school. The relationship between this population, lack of access to healthcare, and poor health is demonstrated by the clients we serve.

The We Walk program directly addresses these racial and ethnic health disparities through nutrition, fitness and a systems-building approach to better health for North Hamilton residents. Our program draws on the assets of the community to reduce the health risks chronically associated with minority populations.

#### **PROGRAM NARRATIVE**

Since 1984, the North Hamilton Family Alliance, Inc. (NHFA) has been working to improve the quality of life for all families, particularly the underserved, in greater North Hamilton. We empower people to become physically fit and financially independent, strengthening both the physical and economic vitality of the city. The organization has grown to focus not only on the physical health of inner-city North Hamilton residents, but also on the fiscal health of its citizens, and on the need to improve the overall health of the city through sustained, community-driven revitalization efforts.

Today the We Walk Coalition's vision is to create a healthy community through a comprehensive, integrated and culturally competent community-based and systems approach that supports, empowers, and preserves the health and integrity of North Hamilton families. With our experience serving low-income families and our emerging understanding of the impact of nutrition and exercise on health, the NHFA continues to see the need to take a more active role in not only improving the health status of North Hamilton families but continuing to build a system of supports for healthy behaviors and lifestyle changes.

The NHFA has extensive reach into underserved North Hamilton communities, positioning us as an agent of change. Our long history of successful partnerships with community stakeholders, coalition members and other community organizations helps us to successfully reach our partner populations, one that may not otherwise be willing to engage in a sustained effort to reduce chronic health risk factors through an exercise fitness program.

Our commitment to meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of our partner populations is evidenced throughout our organization and We Walk program. Program materials and sessions

are offered in Spanish and English. We train community members to become certified fitness instructors so that they can better model healthy behaviors from within the population. Program staff and health workers act as advocates for our participants within the larger healthcare system and providers.

In addition, our fitness venues and community wellness events are held within the community that we serve, relieving transportation needs and providing better ongoing access to those within the city. And most importantly, our We Walk coalition brings relevant practitioners, community members, service providers, and research and educational institutions and the city together to better address minority health needs in our community.

As suggested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the majority of adults are not physically active or do not participate in enough physical activity to improve health. The prevalence of physical inactivity in minority groups is even higher than that in the general population. In Minnesota in 2003, only 34% of Blacks and 40% of Hispanics participated in recommended amounts of regular physical activity as compared to 55% of Whites. Twenty-six percent and 35.5 percent were completely inactive respectively compared to 10% of Whites.

This lack of physical activity, combined with lack of access to insurance and healthcare and inequities in the health treatment of minority populations, leads to some stunning numbers. According to the Kaiser Foundation, in MN in 2002 African-Americans had obesity rates nearly 15% and Hispanics over 5%, higher than Whites, and the incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease were significantly higher among the Black population.

We know we can make a demonstrable and lasting difference in the lives of our partner populations. A comparative two-year analysis of 60 We Walk program participants has produced measurable results indicating a reduction of risk factors including the following percentage decreases: 49% in blood pressure; 55% in glucose; 66% in weight; 58% in BMI; 60% in percentage of body fat; 58% in chest measurements; 33% in waist measurements; 40% in hip measurements; 45% in right arm measurements; and 51% in right thigh measurements.

To truly eliminate the economic barriers facing our clients, we also need to empower them to improve their health. The purpose of this request is to not only continue our fitness and wellness programs for low-income North Hamilton residents, but to strengthen and expand our work through the establishment of a system of supports for healthy behaviors and life style changes. This systems-building approach will integrate our fitness and wellness efforts with the establishment of city-wide fitness goals and will institutionalize wellness throughout the community by our diverse coalition of community members, health care providers, social service agencies, government agencies and the corporate sector.

Our program goals speak directly to the health disparities faced by underserved populations in our city:

- Increase the overall health of underserved and disengaged people of color in the North Hamilton community.

- Demonstrate positive health and wellness for inner-city North Hamilton residents, including the elderly, those with disabilities, and limited-English speakers.
- Develop an effective city-wide collaboration engaging the city of North Hamilton and its residents to improve the health of the city.
- Enliven the inner-city neighborhoods of North Hamilton by making the community safe, vital, and strong not only through health and wellness, but through education, community engagement and civic pride.

Your support of the We Walk program will increase the access to fitness and nutritional opportunities for underserved residents in urban North Hamilton. The program will employ the following strategies: (I) engaging underserved residents in exercise, (II) hosting community health and wellness workshops, (III) engaging and training community members as fitness trainers to model positive health, (IV) the further development of the We Walk Coalition focusing on a systems building approach to achieving health and wellness in North Hamilton, and (V) partnering with relevant community organizations and hospitals to provide necessary expertise.

### ***I. Fitness Programming***

Participants will engage in ongoing fitness programs at least twice weekly over each 12 week program cycle. Fitness programs will consist of the community walking program, where residents will walk with trained leaders in community trails, public parks, malls and school tracks. Walkers will participate in the 10,000 Step program, utilizing pedometers to encourage 10,000 steps per day, to increase cardiovascular health and to decrease obesity and its related chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. We will also integrate yoga, aerobics and water aerobics, and salsa and line dancing.

To involve older Americans, We Walk has partnered with the Arthritis Foundation to implement their Walk with Ease Program that focuses on low-impact walking activities and/or warm water aerobics for those with limited mobility. We Walk has also engaged the older and disabled community through targeted outreach and a collaborative program with the Hospital of St. Raphael where accessible exercise venues and fitness programs such as standing or chair aerobic activities are offered. These programs are made possible with the assistance of Coalition members.

### ***II. Community Health Workshops***

To increase both visibility of the program and our outreach into the community, we will also host quarterly interactive nutrition and health workshops. These events will take place in public venues throughout the city, giving residents a chance to take part in group fitness programs and health screenings. Participants in the ongoing 12-week programs will also participate in ongoing health screenings to assess changes in their overall health.

### ***III. Community Members as Fitness Leaders***

In addition to the relevant types of fitness programs offered, we will recruit members of the community to facilitate and lead the sessions, maintaining a pool of certified instructors to facilitate fitness and nutritional sessions. By modeling healthy lifestyles, these community

members can help change behavior; by understanding the barriers that this population faces, they can help sustain and institutionalize positive health.

#### ***IV. We Walk Coalition***

By involving the community we serve in the development of the project, we hope to engender real change. We have assembled a community advisory board to insure that the program will meet community needs. Through our initial outreach efforts, we've already learned that by offering walking groups, line and salsa dancing, aerobics (water aerobics for the elderly and disabled) and yoga, we will appeal to the community and have a much better chance of making a true lasting difference in their health.

#### ***V. Community Partnerships***

Established community health agencies and clinics will provide health assessments and provide nutritional workshops aimed at our target population. And, through our partnerships with the city and a coalition of community organizations, we will identify safe, accessible spaces within the neighborhood to host our programs.

We are committed to maintaining and improving our key community relationships in order to continue providing ongoing fitness and wellness programs for low-income North Hamilton residents. We intend to increase our collaborations to expand upon the existing partnerships that we have forged over the last three years with the social service agencies and the members of the health care community.

We have initiated the planning process with the city's administration and other relevant stakeholders that can create a system's approach to wellness in the city of North Hamilton. We've also done the preliminary outreach work to engage North Hamilton Hospital, Gallup Prevention Research Center, and School of Medicine in our efforts to reduce the health disparities plagued by our partner population.

Our vision for We Walk is to involve the community in healing itself to better health. Our dream is to help individuals in greater North Hamilton recognize that they can enliven their community by connecting with each other through fitness, particularly by making use of public spaces like parks, community centers, and bicycle and walking paths as a way of taking back their neighborhoods.

We Walk will benefit the North Hamilton community not only by improving the health of North Hamilton's inner-city residents, but in turn by improving the community's vitality and fiscal fitness. Increasing the health of community members will directly benefit the health of the city. The health of the city will improve, as will its financial health, through decreased healthcare costs and a more productive workforce.

We envision a revitalized inner-city North Hamilton, where an older woman can swim at the community pool to strengthen her heart, a young mom can relieve stress through yoga and a healthier diet for herself and her family, and the child can play safely in the park under the watchful eyes of a healed community.

## **EVALUATION**

A strong qualitative and quantitative evaluation is essential not only for the success of our program, but for the health of our participants. Results will be measured through program participation, attendance at community health forums, and periodic health assessments measuring blood pressure, glucose level, girth measurements, weight, and Body Mass Index.

Through periodic medical testing, providers will document a reduction in blood glucose levels to within normal range for at least 25 previously diabetic and 25 pre-diabetic participants who complete the program. Providers will also perform periodic assessments to document a decrease in the percentage of body fat/girth in at least 25 program participants.

Our goal will be to maintain at least 40% of the initial program participants in an ongoing positive health program, with at least half demonstrating improved health status and a positive change in their daily nutritional habits including a decrease in consumption of saturated and trans-fats and an increase in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat high protein foods.

Program staff will also keep detailed logs detailing participant engagement in the program, participation in community walks and will provide participants with pedometers and monitor progress. We will also maintain documentation of participant registration with our physician partners, and certification of community members as fitness trainers. Program staff will also administer pre- and post-event questionnaires on health and wellness to program participants to determine changes in knowledge and attitudes toward positive health.

Our success is dependent upon a vibrant, active and change-generating We Walk Coalition whose work provides a systems building framework to improve community and city health. City-wide fitness goals will be identified and declared by the Mayor's Office. Our four free community wellness events will be well-attended by low-income minority populations in North Hamilton. And, access to at least one indoor and one outdoor fitness venue previously not available to community residents will be open, and community residents will complete a successful neighborhood beautification project.

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF EFFORT**

Our future plans are to increase emphasis on working in coalition to meet the needs of our partner population. We will continue to work with the city of North Hamilton to establish city-wide fitness goals and to integrate the various efforts in the city that are already supporting healthy behaviors among our residents.

For example, we would like to partner with the state board of education's Obesity Initiative on our community health and wellness workshops. As the children are taught healthier eating habits in the schools, we will work with parents to reinforce these habits by modeling healthy eating behaviors. To fulfill a family-centered, systems-based approach we plan on linking our work with adults to the city's ongoing work with children to better serve and empower the whole family through our combined efforts.

We also intend to partner with local area businesses. The supermarkets in our targeted inner-city areas could be encouraged to come together in a joint effort to develop better marketing around the healthier food choices. We plan to reach out to the faith community, as well, and expand our relationships with North Hamilton's churches. Our focus and our energies will be projected toward building community-based infrastructures.

We will also increase our efforts at both corporate and foundation support to sustain the program, while looking into revenue generating options to increase our capacity. Food and exercise corporations will be approached to tie-in their corporate marketing efforts, as a partnership with We Walk would give them an opportunity to strengthen their image within the community and make a difference for the underserved populations we serve.

We envision We Walk staff offering training and technical assistance on our unique approach to community wellness for underserved populations. And, we hope to increase support from hospitals and healthcare providers for our work to reduce the health risk factors for city residents and get them on a track to better health.

It will be as a community that we will reduce racial and ethnic health disparities and improve the health status of African American, Hispanics, and multi-racial populations in North Hamilton. We can reduce the risk factors associated with chronic illnesses that are disproportionately represented among our partner populations. We will improve the health of our distressed North Hamilton community, empowering it to regain its vitality and security through positive health and wellness. By addressing the factors that increase the risk of illness among individuals, we can help heal not only the individual, but the entire community.

## **BUDGET JUSTIFICATION**

The personnel line items in the above budget include a salary and fringe benefits for a project coordinator. This individual is responsible for the day-to-day oversight of We Walk, including contact with instructors and participants, outreach to current and potential community partners, and continuing efforts to seek funding to achieve sustainability. The final line item under personnel indicates payments to health providers and other community partners who help the North Hamilton Family Alliance conduct assessments and evaluations of participants to measure the success of We Walk.

We Walk and the North Hamilton Family Alliance encourage the participation of community members with backgrounds in exercise instruction by offering stipends to those willing to lead walking groups, salsa dancing groups, yoga sessions, and other activities. Through funding from the Minnesota Health Foundation, we will provide these stipends to community members for each of two semesters. Your support will also cover the fees for our community fitness instructors, who teach classes and provide technical assistance on how best to lead walking and other exercise groups.

A portion of the funding would cover rent for our facilities and direct postage to communicate with participants about health assessments and other We Walk activities. We also intend to update our available fitness equipment on an ongoing basis; we have included this need as a line item.

The North Hamilton Family Alliance seeks to be successful by sharing the We Walk experience with other organizations around the country and learning from those organizations' experiences. We also seek to keep our staff and volunteers on the cutting edge of developments in the fitness arena. For those reasons, we are seeking funding to attend conferences and seminars related to our goals. This funding can be found in the Training/Development line item as well as Travel/Lodging.

We Walk's needs include \$2,500 in office supplies and materials for staff and volunteers as well as a significant investment to maintain a database of current participants and their health status information. We Walk also seeks to reach out to community leaders through our marketing and public relations efforts, which are partially funded here, and those efforts will include the printing, copying, and mailing costs that make up the last line item in the OTPE section of this budget. Finally, we have included a standard 15% line item for indirect costs.