

Aetna Announces Winners of Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge

February 17, 2019

The Hartford-based Aetna Foundation has announced the winners of its Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge.

Launched in partnership with the American Public Health Association and the National Association of Counties, the program supports the efforts of small to midsize cities and counties working to tackle the most pressing health issues in their communities. This year, in addition to two grand-prize winners, eight programs were designated as runners-up and will each receive prizes ranging from \$25,000 to \$50,000 in support of their work.

This year's grand prize (\$500,000) in the midsize city or county category was awarded to the Mecklenburg County Health Department in North Carolina for its Village HeartBEAT program, which, in partnership with more than sixty local faith-based organizations, helped over twenty thousand local residents, many of them African American, access resources designed to reduce cardiovascular risk factors such as smoking and obesity. As a result of the program, smoking in the community was reduced from 17.4 percent of the population to 13.9 percent and the obesity rate declined from 70 percent to 64.7 percent. And the grand prize (\$250,000) in the small city and county category was awarded to the Coalition United to Reach Equity(CURE) in Bridgeport, Connecticut, for its East End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone program, which establishes small markets and cafes in known food deserts in the city, with the goal of generating community connectedness, encouraging healthy eating habits, and addressing chronic food insecurity.

"While every community faces unique health issues, we know a lot can be accomplished when cities and counties join forces," said APHA executive director Georges C. Benjamin. "It is our hope that these two programs, along with the rest of the challenge participants, will inspire others and serve as models of success and progress for communities around the country who face similar health issues."

"Aetna Foundation, American Public Health Association and the National Association of Counties Unveil Winners of National Health Challenge." Aetna Foundation Press
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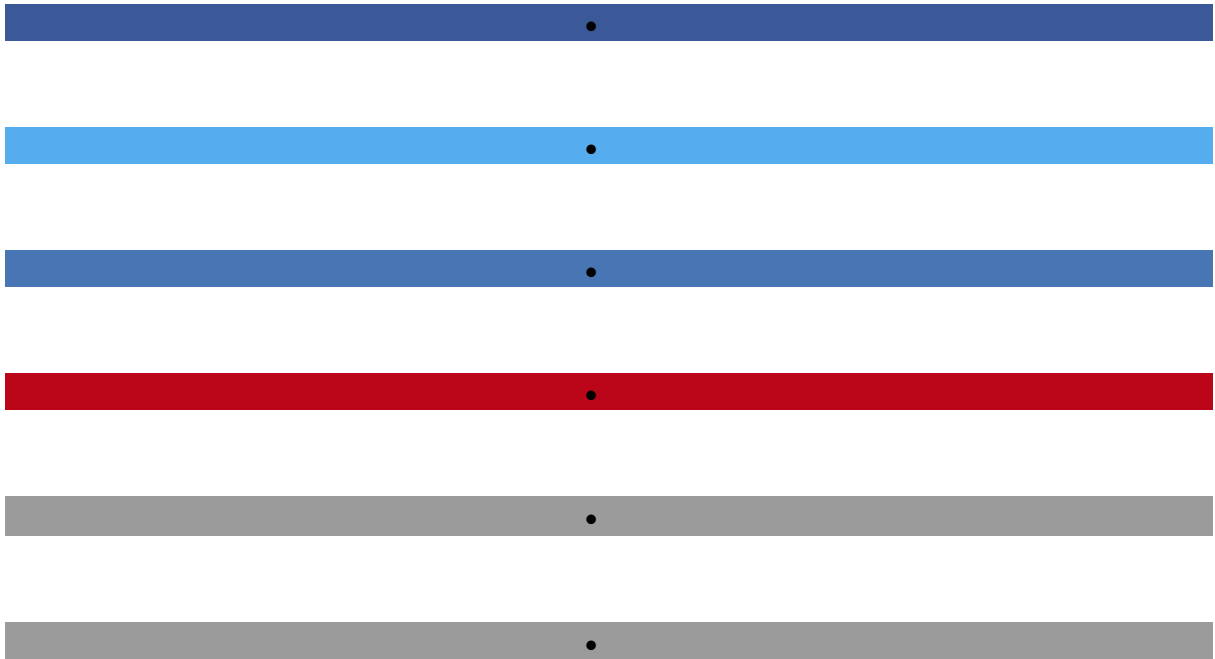
Aetna Foundation, American Public Health Association and the National Association of Counties Unveil Winners of National Health Challenge

From Faith-Based Organizations Empowering Healthy Habits to Pop-Up Markets Rebuilding Community Trust: \$1.5 Million Awarded to Local Solutions Addressing Social Determinants of Health



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HARTFORD, Conn., Feb. 12, 2019 /PRNewswire/ -- As part of an ongoing commitment to supporting community health and wellness, the Aetna Foundation today announced the two grand prize winners of the Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge (the Challenge). The Mecklenburg County, N.C., Village HeartBEAT program won the \$500,000 grand prize from the mid-sized city or county category (population 250,001 – 600,000) and the Coalition United to Reach Equity (CURE) in Bridgeport, Conn., was awarded the grand prize of \$250,000 in the small-sized city or county category (population 65,000 – 200,000).

The Challenge was launched in partnership with the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the National Association of Counties (NACo), empowering 50 small-to-mid-sized cities and counties nationwide to make measurable, scalable improvements to public health issues in their local communities. Since its inception, the Challenge awarded a total of \$1.5 million in grants and prizes to the 50 participating programs to support their efforts to tackle the most pressing health issues facing their communities. In addition to the two grand prize winners, eight programs were designated as runners up in recognition of their achievements, each receiving prizes ranging from \$25,000 - \$50,000 to help continue their work.

The awarding of the Challenge prizes, funded by the Aetna Foundation, is part of a \$100 million commitment by CVS Health and its affiliates to making community health and wellness central to the company's charge for a better world. The new *Building Healthier Communities* initiative, which will be funded over five years by CVS Health and the CVS Health and Aetna Foundations, builds upon the outstanding tradition of community investment by CVS Health and Aetna and helps to advance CVS Health's purpose of helping people on their path to better health.

"In order to solve our most pressing public health issues, we have to start at the local level – acknowledging that the solutions to our problems are as diverse as the communities facing them," said Karen S. Lynch, Executive Vice President, CVS Health and President, Aetna. "These communities are able to get to the heart of their unique challenges and create impactful programs that we hope can be replicated in other communities nationwide."

Over the course of the Challenge, both winners improved local health outcomes with strong, scalable results:

- **In Mecklenburg County, NC**, the African-American population is disproportionately impacted by cardiovascular disease by nearly 20 percent compared to their white counterparts. To combat this, Village HeartBEAT (VHB) activated more than 60 local faith-based organizations to help over 20,000 local residents access health resources to reduce cardiovascular risk. As a result, VHB reduced smoking in the community from 17.4 percent to 13.9 percent and obesity rates from 70 percent to 64.7 percent.
- **Bridgeport (CT) CURE/ East End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ)** addressed decades of food insecurity and public mistrust through development of a pop-up market in a documented food desert, improving availability of healthy foods, living wage jobs and sparking greater community cohesiveness. Over the past three years, Bridgeport CURE secured more than 53,000 volunteer hours and leveraged strong cross-sector partnerships to overcome major policy obstacles.

"While every community faces unique health issues, we know a lot can be accomplished when cities and counties join forces," said APHA executive director Georges C. Benjamin. "It is our hope that these two programs, along with the rest of the Challenge participants, will inspire others and serve as models of success and progress for communities around the country who face similar health issues."

The first cohort of Challenge participants were chosen out of hundreds of city governments, local municipalities, health departments, educational institutions and other entities that applied to enter the competition. Improvements were measured around at least one of five domains: healthy behaviors, community safety, built environment, social/economic factors and environmental exposures. The Challenge winners and runners up were selected with assistance from an Advisory Council of public health leaders including elected officials, professors and physicians. RAND Corporation was tapped to evaluate the improvements in social determinants of health achieved and identify the most promising practices with potential for replication.

"Our winners and runners up have demonstrated the ability of counties to transform the communities they support," said NACo president Greg Cox. "Organizations and leaders at the county level are in a unique position to champion the needs of local residents and join community partners in the effort to improve health outcomes for all residents to make a positive health impact."