



Grand Forks Launches the First Blue Zones Project in North Dakota

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To transform the well-being of residents, the State of North Dakota and Altru Health System launch the Blue Zones Project.

The State of North Dakota and Altru Health System announce the launch of the Blue Zones Project in Grand Forks. The Blue Zones Project is a comprehensive initiative that will use an evidence-based approach to transform the environments in which people live, work, learn and play to measurably improve well-being, economic vitality and resilience. This will be the first Blue Zones Project to launch in North Dakota and is supported by a unique collaboration among Altru Health System, Altru Foundation, and the North Dakota State Department of Health. This exciting public-private partnership is a model for what other cities and states can do with the right forward-thinking leadership and planning, and will make Grand Forks a standalone demonstration project for the upper Midwest.

"The health and well-being of North Dakotans is a top priority of our administration and an essential element in building healthy, vibrant communities and a skilled 21st century workforce – two pillars of our Main Street Initiative," said Gov. Doug Burgum. "The Grand Forks project has the potential to become a model for enhancing community health and economic vitality as we strive to empower people, improve lives and inspire success."

A first-of-its-kind population health initiative, the Blue Zones Project is based on research and principles developed by Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Fellow and New York Times best-selling author, who identified the cultures of the world—or blue zones—with the healthiest, longest-living populations.

For the first time, life expectancy and quality of life in the U.S. are on the decline, while the cost of disease and isolation are unsustainably high. Research indicates where people live has a bigger influence on health than genetics, so the Blue Zones Project focuses on the single largest determinant of health: the places people live. By focusing on the Life Radius—the area close to home where people spend 90% of their lives—the Blue Zones Project has been able to move the needle in improving overall population health, raising employee and student productivity, and boosting economic vitality and development.

To tackle the "ZIP code effect," the Blue Zones Project works with communities to optimize public policies, social connections, and the places and spaces where people spend the most time (streets, parks, schools, workplaces, grocery stores, faith communities, homes) so that healthy choices are easy and accessible to all.

Todd Forkel, CEO of Altru Health System, said, "Our mission is to improve health and enrich life, and one of the biggest ways to improve the health and lives of our patients is to invest in our community and in our workforce. The Blue Zones Project has a proven track record in using a community-wide approach to creating a healthier, happier, and more productive workforce, and that's a win-win for everyone involved. This is especially important in a time when frontline workers are so deserving of every support we can give them."

Blue Zones Project has worked in 70 cities in the U.S. to date. Participating communities have seen double-digit drops in obesity and smoking rates, economic investment in downtown corridors, grant-funding awards to support policies and programs aimed at improving health equity and millions of dollars of savings in health care costs.

"Our community has so many great things that make it shine, yet we see opportunities when it comes to the health of our residents," said Kristi Hall-Jiran, Chief Philanthropy and Partnership Officer at Altru. "Blue Zones has the potential to create meaningful and lasting change and make a huge impact, not only on the health of our community, but also on our economic vitality. We have high hopes for how this project will positively influence the lives of our neighbors in the Near North neighborhood, which has been identified as the place for the highest opportunity and where we will begin our work with the Blue Zones Project."

"Never before has there been a greater focus on the environment and behaviors that keep us well, and the Blue Zones model lifts well-being at the community level by making healthy choices easier in all the places people live, work, learn and play," said Ben Leedle, CEO of Blue Zones, LLC and co-founder of Blue Zones Project. "The community partners in Grand Forks, with funding through the North Dakota Department of Health, have displayed incredible vision and leadership in coming together to empower their residents and demonstrate to the rest of the State the power of well-being."

The launch of Blue Zones Project Grand Forks represents the beginning of a multi-year collaborative effort that involves the entire community working together toward one common goal – to support and build a culture of community health and well-being.

About Blue Zones Project

Blue Zones Project® is a community-led well-being improvement initiative designed to make healthy choices easier through permanent changes to a city's environment, policy, and social networks. Established in 2010, Blue Zones Project is based on research by Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Fellow and New York Times bestselling author who identified five cultures of the world—or blue zones—with the highest concentration of people living to 100 years or older. Blue Zones Project incorporates Buettner's findings and works with cities to implement policies and programs that will move a community toward optimal health and well-being. Currently, 70 communities across North America have joined Blue Zones Project, impacting more than 4.5 million citizens. The population health solution includes Beach Cities Health District in California; 15 cities in Iowa; Albert Lea, Minnesota; the city of Fort Worth, Texas; Corry, Pennsylvania; Brevard, North Carolina; and communities in Southwest Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Blue Zones Project is a partnership between Blue Zones, LLC, and Sharecare, Inc. (NASDAQ: [SHCR](#)) For more information, visit bluezonesproject.com.

About Altru

Based in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Altru Health System is a physician-led, multispecialty group practice with an acute care hospital, Level II trauma

center, specialty hospital, more than two dozen Grand Forks and regional practice locations, and a large home care network. Altru Health System was the first member of the Mayo Clinic Care Network, extending Mayo Clinic knowledge and expertise to the patients we serve. For more information, visit altru.org.