



Salinas becomes first certified Blue Zones Community® in Monterey County, California

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The city exceeded its phase one well-being transformation goals with Blue Zones Project

SALINAS, Calif., Aug. 21, 2024 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Sharecare (Nasdaq: [SHCR](#)) and Blue Zones, LLC, today announced that Salinas, CA has achieved Blue Zones Community® certification, making it the first to earn the designation in Monterey County. The certification recognizes Salinas' measurable success in well-being transformation through the effective implementation of Blue Zones Project®, a pioneering population health initiative that integrates evidence-based best practices in built environment, policy, and social connection within participating communities.

Brought to Salinas by Salinas Valley Health, Taylor Farms, and Montage Health in 2018, the initiative has engaged local leaders, volunteers, and organizations to help residents move naturally, eat better, develop healthy connections, and live with purpose. Given the early success in Salinas, the Project's footprint expanded across Monterey County in 2021, and the remaining communities will be eligible for Blue Zones Community certification next year.

"At Salinas Valley Health, our mission is to improve the health and well-being of everyone in our community," said Dr. Allen Radner, CEO of Salinas Valley Health. "We introduced the Blue Zones Project to Salinas in 2018 with the aim of reducing chronic disease rates and promoting better health. Over the past six years, the initiative has expanded, resulting in a measurable reduction in chronic health risks and increased civic pride. Salinas' designation as a certified Blue Zones Community marks an important milestone in this effort."

Salinas earned the designation by meeting and exceeding Project benchmarks in categories including resident and employer engagement rates, well-being scores, and community policies. As a result of the community-wide effort led by the local Blue Zones Project team, Salinas' overall community well-being score improved by 5.9 points since 2019, during a time when the rest of the country experienced a dramatic downward trend. Each point increase in well-being for a population leads to approximately a two percent reduction in ER visits and hospital utilization, and to approximately a one percent reduction in total health care costs. In addition:

- Residents who report they are thriving in daily life rose from 58.8% to 66.6% of the population;
- Individuals are moving more, with 65.5% reporting at least 30 minutes of exercise three or more days per week, compared to 56.2% in 2019;
- 54% fewer residents report high cholesterol;
- Tobacco use is down to 2.8%, well below state and national averages;
- Nearly \$21.7 million in add-on funding was leveraged for well-being projects; and
- Over \$43.7 million in avoided medical and lost productivity costs were gained over the last five years.

These impressive measures are the direct result of the participation of more than 18,500 individuals and more than 98 organizations who implemented Project programs, activities, and best practices. Thirty-six new community policies, plans and initiatives which were implemented as part of the Project have improved built environment infrastructure, food systems, and tobacco use across Salinas to support better health among residents.

"Healthy fresh food and a healthy community is at the heart of Taylor Farms," said Bruce Taylor, Chairman and CEO of Taylor Farms. "As one of Blue Zones Project's local sponsors, we've witnessed our team members, families, and friends get involved in Blue Zones Project and work together to help make Salinas a healthier community for all."

Since 2018, Blue Zones Project has been instrumental in helping partners in the community rally around well-being. Twenty-five area schools implemented policies and introduced food options that encourage healthy eating on campus, integrated physical activity into the day, and incorporated other Blue Zones principles into their environments to positively impact students. Twenty-eight local restaurants added over 150 Blue Zones-inspired dishes to make healthier choices easier while dining out. Twenty-eight worksites took dedicated steps to implement best practices that improve employee engagement and well-being by becoming Blue Zones Project Approved™ Blue Zones Project purpose programs saw more than 1,280 individuals attend purpose workshops and residents generated over \$250,000 for the community through more than 5,600 volunteer hours donated. Notable policy initiatives like the establishment of the Monterey County Food System Coalition are helping expand access to healthy foods, among other policy improvements and implementations.

"We are proud to support and sponsor the Blue Zones Project and the incredible progress it has made in transforming the well-being of residents in Salinas," said Dr. Steven Packer, President/CEO of Montage Health. "This achievement is a testament to the dedication and collaborative spirit of our partners, residents, and local organizations, all united by a common goal: to nurture the health and happiness of every member of our community."

"We know that communities with greater well-being have lower healthcare costs, higher productivity, and are recognized as the great places to live," said Michael Acker, SVP and general manager of Blue Zones Project at Sharecare. "The collective impact achieved by individuals across Salinas demonstrates the positive change that can happen when people come together with a focused and sustained commitment to community well-being."

"Salinas, a majority-minority city with a rich cultural heritage, has set a new standard for creating a culture of well-being. Since the pandemic, leaders all over the country are looking for innovative and comprehensive approaches to improving community well-being, and Salinas' impressive success is a model for other diverse and dynamic communities who want to create healthy environments and systems that benefit everyone," said Ben Leedle, CEO of Blue Zones and Co-founder of Blue Zones Project.

Going forward, local leaders and volunteers continue to champion the work of Blue Zones Project as the initiative continues across Monterey County. The rest of the Monterey County projects are expected to undergo certification review in the Spring of 2025.

Blue Zones Project is brought to Monterey County through an innovative sponsorship by Salinas Valley Health, Taylor Farms, and Montage Health in

collaboration with Sharecare, Inc. and Blue Zones, LLC.

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. Blue Zones Project is based on research by Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Fellow and New York Times best-selling 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 which will move a community toward optimal health and well-being. Currently, more than 75 communities across North America have joined Blue Zones Project, impacting more than 4.5 million citizens. The population health solution includes two Health Districts 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 by Sharecare is a partnership between Blue Zones, LLC, and Sharecare, Inc. For more information, visit bluezonesproject.com.

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