

Blue Zones Project



BACKGROUND, MAY 2018

An exclusive partnership between Blue Zones, LLC and Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project® is a community-by-community well-being improvement initiative designed to help people lead longer, better lives by making healthy choices easier. The initiative promotes simple environmental changes and behaviors based on lifestyles in Blue Zones® areas.

Blue Zones Project is inspired by Dan Buettner, a National Geographic Fellow and New York Times best-selling author who identified five regions of the world—or Blue Zones—with the highest concentration of people living to 100 years or older. They include Loma Linda, California; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Sardinia, Italy; Ikaria, Greece; and Okinawa, Japan.

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. The first test city, Albert Lea, Minnesota, reported marked improvements in well-being, including a 49 percent drop in healthcare claims for city workers and a 21 percent reduction in absenteeism for key employers.

Today, Blue Zones Project partners with communities throughout the United States to develop public-private partnerships and create sustainable changes to environment, policy, and social networks. Currently, 43 communities in nine states have joined Blue Zones Project, impacting more than 3 million Americans. The movement includes three beach cities in California; 15 cities in Iowa; Albert Lea, Minnesota; the city of Fort Worth; and communities in Southwest Florida, Hawaii, Oklahoma, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Illinois. As the Blue Zones Project movement gains momentum, it seeks new communities with leaders committed to well-being transformation.

When applying to become part of Blue Zones Project, community leaders and residents identify local strengths and opportunities, and outline community efforts that might support the initiative. Once a city is selected, local team members are hired to work within the community to develop and adopt a Blueprint, or a detailed implementation plan with goals, strategies, and metrics to guide implementation of Blue Zones Project over the coming years.

Blue Zones Project then delivers best practices and strategy for making healthy choices easier through sustainable change in worksites, schools, restaurants, and grocery stores and community policy. Blue Zones Project also encourages people living within these communities to make small, simple changes to their daily routines, nudging them to make healthier choices where they live, work, pray, and play. Buettner identified these best practices as the Power 9® principles—nine habits of the world's longest living people. From moving naturally to waking up each day with purpose, the Power 9 are proven to support well-being and longevity.

Once a city meets its predetermined goals, it is certified as a Blue Zones Community®. Well-being improvement is measured by the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index™ and community-reported metrics.

For more information on Blue Zones Project and how it is inspiring better well-being in communities across the nation, visit bluezonesproject.com.

VALUE SUMMARY

In 2009, research in the Journal of American Medicine indicated that less than 8 percent of the U.S. population adhere to five core healthy habits—not smoking, eating healthfully, maintaining regular physical activity, avoiding increased use of alcohol, and maintaining a healthy weight—down from 15 percent only 20 years previous. Today, indicators point to that number being halved again—meaning, less than 4 percent of the U.S. population today achieves consistency in adhering to healthy habits. Lifestyle risks and the burden of chronic disease continue to increase dramatically, causing unsustainable growth in medical costs, lost productivity, and even regional economic decline.

It is well established that the underlying causes of these trends are our environments—the people, places, and policies we are exposed to every day. These factors influence how we make thousands of decisions every day—many unconsciously—that form our habits. Therein lies the unique opportunity to do something different in order to impact an entire community: change the environments where people spend time.

Blue Zones Project® is a proven approach based on that premise. Nearly 15 years of research has shown that by applying the cultural and environmental practices of the world’s longest-lived people, we can quickly and dramatically change a community’s future course to one of improved health and economic vitality. By adopting certain systemic changes, whole communities have been able to re-engineer environments and culture to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

We know that sustainably increasing a population’s well-being just one point (on one-hundred-point scale) from its current baseline leads to a 1% decrease in total healthcare costs, 2% reduction in hospital admissions, and 0.6% reduction in lost workforce productivity.

For Health Systems, Insurers, Community Hospitals, Health Districts and Foundations, implementing Blue Zones Project creates medical-cost savings, improved productivity, regional economic impact, media value, and related follow-on community grants.

Blue Zones Project Fort Worth

- Since launching Blue Zones Project, Fort Worth has bucked a nationwide trend of decreasing well-being. Fort Worth’s Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index™ score has improved since 2014, while the U.S. score has declined.
- Since 2014, smoking rates are statistically significantly down by 2.5 percentage points, nearly a 13% decrease. This should only continue to improve with the comprehensive tobacco policy that was implemented in early 2018 prohibiting tobacco and e-cigarette use in bar in bingo lounges.
- From 2014-2017, well-being has fared better in Fort Worth than in the US in four of the five well-being elements (purpose, social, financial, and physical).

Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida

- Since launching Blue Zones Project, Southwest Florida has remained in first place in the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index Community Ranking, three years in a row. Despite a negative tide in the nation, well-being in Southwest Florida continues to improve. (See [NEJM Catalyst article](#).)
- Since 2015, residents have experienced a 10% drop in daily stress, a 4.3% increase in those who exercise at least 30 minutes three days per week, and a 4.7% increase in those who eat five or more servings of produce four or more days per week.
- Smoking rates in Southwest Florida remain low at just over 9%, half the national average of 18%, and more than half of residents are thriving across all five well-being elements.