

Case study

Making healthier happen one step at a time



Organization: **Sioux City Community School District**

Location: **Sioux City, Iowa**

Number of employees: **2,500+**

Serves: **≈15,000 students in 22 schools**



Photo courtesy of Sioux City Community School District

Better health choices. Better health outcomes. Lower costs. See how Sioux City Community School District's benefits strategy is built to drive healthy behaviors and lower costs.

Situation

- Located in the tristate region of Iowa, South Dakota and Nebraska, the district wanted to offer a competitive benefits package that would attract and retain staff
- The district wanted its staff to model the importance of staying healthy – physically and mentally – while supporting their students every day
- The district wanted to improve health outcomes for individuals managing chronic conditions and to reduce the risk of worsening conditions and/or the development of comorbidities

Action

- The district sought to take full advantage of programs included in their health insurance plan to help contain costs, including an activity-based incentive program that rewards healthy behaviors and programs to help manage chronic diseases
- Employees earned rewards for activities like completing health surveys, tracking their sleep and meeting daily step counts
- The district used a wellness budget to provide even more opportunities for their staff to engage in wellness activities together

Results

\$1.3M paid out by UnitedHealthcare wellness programs to members since 2013¹

↓14.3% fewer ER visits among members engaged in the UnitedHealthcare Rewards program²

2,650 total pounds lost by Real Appeal[®] participants from July 2015–June 2025³

Achieving better health while managing costs

As teachers and staff work hard every day serving about 15,000 students, Kim Smith and the human resources team work behind the scenes to ensure they feel supported by the Sioux City Community School District. And it all starts with a strategy to help the staff take full advantage of their UnitedHealthcare benefits, ranging from wellness to chronic disease management programs.

As the benefits and insurance manager, Smith builds a culture of wellness through a variety of events and programs combined with strategic communications designed to engage all employees across the district on their terms. That approach has resulted in lower health care costs among engaged employees.

“Our wellness budget also helps make some of these programs and events even more impactful,” Smith says. “For instance, an on-site biometric event featured a wellness coach to discuss the results if needed. We’ve also extended flu shot clinics past school hours to allow more employees to attend.”

“Since partnering with UnitedHealthcare, the district has implemented initiatives to address physical, mental and emotional well-being.”

Kim Smith

Benefits & Insurance Manager
Sioux City Community School District

Data and insights in action

Employee participation in UnitedHealthcare programs has grown over the years.

Take Real Appeal, for instance: 43% of Sioux City Community School District’s enrolled members experienced a weight loss of 5% or more, surpassing Real Appeal’s benchmarks.¹ The district also has a nearly 60% participation rate in the UHC Rewards program, with members earning above-average incentive rewards.¹

“The numbers we get back from programs help us decide what to address for the upcoming plan year or longer term,” Smith says. “We know the healthier we can help keep our staff, we can keep our claims lower, and lower the premiums that we have to pay in.”

In fact, members who participated in the UHC Rewards program accounted for 14.3% fewer ER visits than nonparticipants.² These members were likely making healthier and more informed choices as a result of their program participation, which may result in lower overall claims costs – especially since ER visits can cost 15–50x more than an urgent care or virtual visit.⁴

In addition, the Sioux City Community School District has used its wellness dollars to support healthy living activities for its workforce. Recent initiatives have included biking to work, participating in a 30-day healthy eating challenge and completing a mental wellness challenge. Employees have also taken part in the ‘28 Days of Kindness’ campaign in February, which promotes social and emotional health.

Communicating opportunities is key

Frequent communications through different methods also keeps wellness front and center for the staff. A monthly newsletter, Health Connection, shares the value of programs like UHC Rewards and how to participate.

Smith also sends other educational communications – including some about behavioral health benefits – and launched a ‘De-stress Challenge’ month, which featured mental health journals. Fliers and window clings also promoted behavioral health services embedded in the UnitedHealthcare medical benefit, including access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

“We know our food service staff and bus drivers have difficulty accessing their emails so we’ll ask secretaries for help to distribute information,” Smith says. “We use our call and texting systems to remind all employees about open enrollment.”

Throughout the year, employees can participate in programs, such as challenges to encourage more walking during the day and a chance to win prizes for getting preventive care.

With support from UnitedHealthcare, Sioux City Community School District has continued to empower its staff to live healthier lives, so they can focus on helping their students and community thrive each and every day they come to work.



^{*}The UnitedHealthcare Health Activation Index® (HAI®) is a proprietary methodology that analyzes and ranks 110M+ choices for 14M+ UnitedHealthcare members. These choices are consolidated into an HAI score, providing an individual assessment of the optimal percentage of health choices.

¹ Sioux City Community School District Health Plan Performance Review based on claims incurred between July 2015–June 2025.

² Sioux City Community School District Health Plan Performance Review based on claims incurred between July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024, and paid through Aug. 31, 2024.

³ Sioux City Community School District Health Plan Performance Review based on claims incurred between July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025.

⁴ Where employees seek care can impact cost and outcomes. UnitedHealthcare, Nov. 5, 2024. Available: <https://www.uhc.com/employer/news-strategies/site-of-care>. Based on UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual book-of-business internal analysis of claims incurred Jan. 2022–Dec. 2022 and paid through Feb. 2023.

This case study is true. Savings calculated on book-of-business case rate savings for these programs. Savings for enrolled members are case specific. Results will vary based on client specific demographics and plan design. Results will vary depending on the state where the insured policy is issued and the amount of engagement by employees.

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accordance with the law. EAP is not an insurance program and may be discontinued at any time. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against UnitedHealthcare or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and is subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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