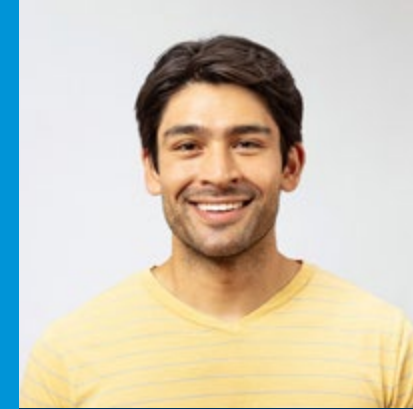


# 2021 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY





3 INTRODUCTION  
6 REACHING MILESTONES  
9 COMMUNITY IMPACT  
51 THE JOURNEY ONWARD



# INTRODUCTION



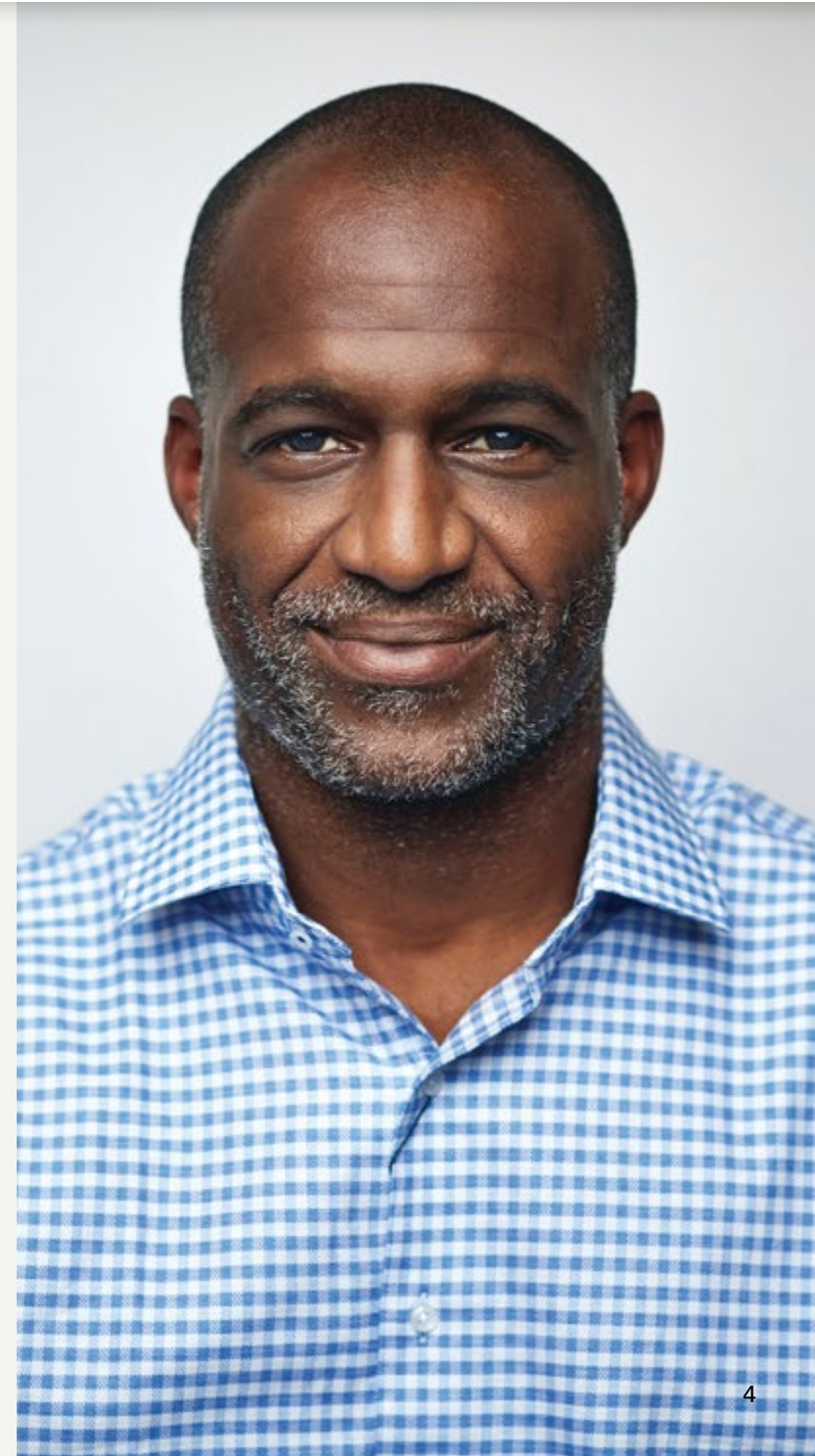


# About the report

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is committed to providing health care to all Minnesotans and advancing racial and health equity throughout the state. This report is a snapshot of our progress and summarizes the achievements of our community impact in 2021.

Advancing racial and health equity is a key strategy to achieving and sustaining health for all. Our time listening to, volunteering for, and funding the community has provided valuable insights to the many health challenges Minnesotans face.

Learnings from the community have guided our contributions throughout 2021 to the work featured in the following pages. It is through this work, initiated and led by the community, that succeeds at advancing equity and moves us forward on our journey toward health for all.



# A note from Dana Erickson

*President and Chief Executive Officer*

**At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, we've remained steadfast in our commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of all communities across our state.**

As you'll see in this report, our commitment to having a positive impact took many forms throughout 2021. This report of highlights is just that – for every initiative mentioned, there are multiple other examples of similar efforts in Minnesota communities.

After declaring racism a public health crisis in 2020, Blue Cross accelerated our efforts last year to address the destructive impact of racism on all matters of health. We continue to be dedicated to taking meaningful action, and to the vision to reach a place and time where racism no longer determines health outcomes, or acts as a barrier to receiving high quality care for Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian Pacific Islander, and other people of color. As Minnesota's largest nonprofit health plan, Blue Cross steadfastly believes that tackling health inequities and systemic racism is paramount for the health of all our members and the state of Minnesota.

Blue Cross also remains committed to having impact where health really happens – and 90 percent of it happens outside the doctor's office. With 10 percent of health influenced by clinical care, and

another 10 percent by genetics, the remaining 80 percent is a result of physical environment, health behaviors and social and economic factors like income, community safety, housing, quality education and food security. We know that health can thrive or wither with the presence or absence of those social and economic factors that have profound impacts. Within this report, you will see many Blue Cross initiatives that address social drivers of health as we aim to create more vibrant and healthy neighborhoods and communities.

I am incredibly proud of our dedicated Blue Cross associates and our numerous community partners who lead this work every day. Together, we are working toward the collective goal of all Minnesotans having what they need to live their healthiest lives possible.

**Dana Erickson**  
President and Chief Executive Officer





# REACHING MILESTONES





Numerous awards and recognitions reflect our efforts and commitment to building a healthy internal culture and positive outcomes for our partners, members and the communities we serve.

### ☆ Top 175 Workplace

The Star Tribune honored Blue Cross as a Top 175 Workplace for 2021. Each year, employees from across Minnesota are invited by the Star Tribune to respond to an annual survey, benchmarking workplace culture. Based on employee responses, 175 companies across Minnesota were chosen as Top Workplaces. Blue Cross is ranked #30 in the Large Business Category.

### ☆ HRC Corporate Equality Index

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation named Blue Cross as a “Best Places to Work for LGBTQ+ Equality.” Our organization received a perfect score on the Corporate Equality Index in 2020 and 2021. The Corporate Equality Index measures corporate policies and practices related to LGBTQ+ workplace equality.

### DHS Commissioner’s Circle of Excellence

☆ The Minnesota Department of Human Services annually recognizes excellence among organizations they’ve partnered with to help people meet their basic needs so they can live in dignity and achieve their highest potential. Blue Cross was selected, along with Metro Transit, for creating mobile COVID-19 vaccination units to reach under-served communities.



### Best of Business, Health Insurer

Twin Cities Business Magazine named Blue Cross as a “Best of Business” recipient for innovation, unparalleled service, and commitment to exceeding customers’ expectations.



### Above and Beyond Award

The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) recognized Blue Cross in 2021 with its annual Above and Beyond award for excellence in providing benefits to employees who serve in the National Guard, the Reserves or have military family members. Blue Cross was one of 25 companies to qualify for this award in Minnesota.



### Partner of the Year Award

Project FINE recognized Blue Cross in 2021 with its Partner of the Year Award for advancing health in Winona, MN and surrounding region for over 15 years.





## ☆ Large Business of the Year

Blue Cross was recognized by the Dakota County Regional Chamber for expanding benefits to members early in 2021, as well as collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Metro Transit to bring COVID-19 vaccines to under-served communities through mobile vaccination clinics.

## ☆ Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Company

Our organization was, once again, named a Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Company for our efforts to hire and retain veterans, community outreach activities and active support of military organizations, and training our clinical staff on referral resources to better assist our veteran members.

## ☆ Award of Excellence

The Minnesota Healthcare Strategy and Communications network awarded Blue Cross third place in the “Best in PR” category for our PR/media efforts for the COVID-19 mobile vaccine bus initiative with the Minnesota Department of Health, Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council.

## ☆ Community Impact Award

Twin Cities Business Magazine recognized Blue Cross with its Community Impact Award for Corporate Leadership on Solving Social Problems including our recent hiring of Bukata Hayes as vice president of racial and health equity and committing \$5 million to the University of Minnesota to establish the Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity.



## Minnesota PRSA Classics

The Minnesota chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has recognized Blue Cross with its annual PRSA Classics awards in the following categories:

- Winner — Programs/Community Relations (2021): statewide volunteer mask-making campaign
- Finalist — Programs/Marketing Products: Consumer (2021): Medicare AEP campaign featuring John Hines, former WCCO Radio host
- Winner — Programs/Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (2021): for “Shedding Light on Health Disparities in Minnesota,” highlighting the Center for Prevention’s partnership with ThreeSixty Journalism at the University of St. Thomas







# COMMUNITY IMPACT





# 2021 by the numbers



**\$17.7 million** was donated to charitable organizations — 99% remaining within Minnesota



**19,290 hours** were donated by associates to charitable organizations in 2021



**37 initiatives** were funded by the Center for Prevention, totaling \$6 million, to support health equity, access to healthy foods, physical activity and commercial tobacco control



**\$5 million** to establish the Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity





# 2021 by the numbers



**61 grants**, totaling \$5 million, through the Foundation to support early childhood programs, safe and welcoming communities, access to coverage, and COVID-19 related relief efforts



**43 housing units** supported in St. Louis County, as well as support for housing stability statewide, as part of a \$450,000 investment



**73,000 views** of antiracist videos created for the 'Make itYour Business' campaign



**650 charitable organizations** received a total of \$1.25 million from associate giving programs and company sponsorships





# RACIAL AND HEALTH EQUITY



# Racial and health equity

Blue Cross has long been committed to creating healthier communities by advancing racial and health equity to enhance the vitality of our state. This is clear through our advocacy efforts for more equitable policies and systems, our investments supporting communities, and as we continue to address the gaps and blind spots within our own organization that have contributed to inequitable structures and systems.

For the health of Minnesota and all its communities, we know we must constantly listen and learn to ensure that positive changes happen and are sustained in communities.



Racial and health inequities have existed for centuries in our society and are steeped in the institution of slavery, colonization and systemic racism. At Blue Cross, we know that it's time for health care institutions to listen, learn and act. We must actively work to address racism and center equity, respect and justice in our efforts to create a healthier future.

– **Bukata Hayes**, *Vice President, Racial and Health Equity and Chair Blue Cross Foundation Board of Directors*





## Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity

To combat racism and enact lasting change, Blue Cross donated \$5 million to the University of Minnesota School of Public Health to establish the Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity. Dr. Rachel Hardeman, associate professor and Blue Cross Endowed Professor of Health and Racial Equity, created the vision for the center and will serve as its founding director.

The Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity will develop education and training on structural racism and health inequities; foster authentic community engagement to address the root causes of racial health inequities and drive action; change the narrative about race and racism to one that does not hold up whiteness as the ideal standard for human beings; and serve as a trusted resource on issues related to racism and health equity. Most critically, when it comes to long-term change, the center intends to be a leader in antiracist health research.



**\$5 million** donated to the U of M to establish the Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity

## Habitat for Humanity

Blue Cross prioritizes volunteerism in support of access to healthy and safe housing through several Habitat for Humanity programs in Minnesota.

This annual volunteer tradition brings associates from across the company together to volunteer their time and talent in support of equitable access to affordable housing. Safe, stable housing is considered a key social determinant of health that drives racial and health equity. In 2021, Blue Cross associates volunteered at two Habitat for Humanity sites in the Twin Cities metro and three in northern Minnesota.





# 'Make it Your Business' campaign

To spur individuals and businesses toward dismantling racism and making health equity their business, an expansive paid campaign called out the direct link between racism and health. The campaign included ads in the Star Tribune, Twin Cities Business Magazine and Minnesota Public Radio.

**14,000 people** visited the resource-packed landing page where users could educate themselves on important issues around race and health. Display media reached more than **11,300,000 impressions**, with more than **105,000 Facebook engagements**. The 'Words Matter' anti-racism **videos had 73,000 views** in 2021.

Visit the campaign landing page on [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com) to learn more:

VISIT PAGE

## 'Words Matter' animated video series

16 animated videos define words and terms related to racial and health equity. View them all at the link below.

WATCH VIDEOS

## 'Make it Your Business' resources

Resources and worksheets help businesses better learn, reflect and, when necessary, change as an organization.

VIEW RESOURCES





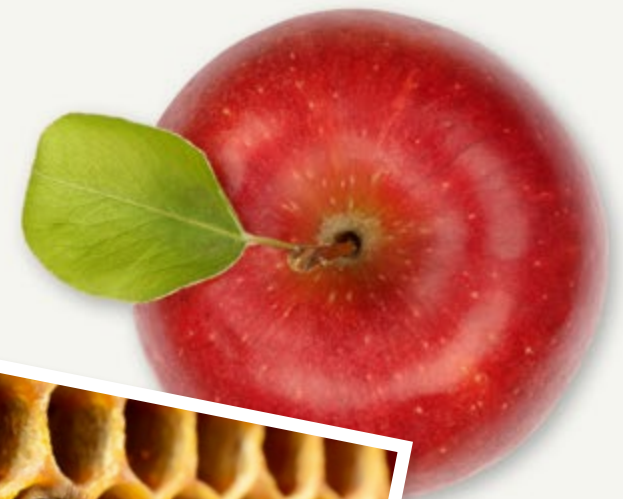
## Leech Lake Family Spirit EmPOWERment program

Rooted in Anishinaabe cultural traditions, the Leech Lake FamilySpirit EmPOWERment program works with Leech Lake tribal members to promote physically active lifestyles, encourage healthy eating habits, promote breastfeeding, and reduce commercial tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure.



**73 cultural gatherings** rooted in Anishinaabe traditions.

This year, the EmPOWERment program secured two beehives to use with tribal members and hosted 73 cultural gatherings rooted in Anishinaabe traditions. The FamilySpirit program also began a partnership with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) Division of Land Management and Minnesota DNR to develop a high tunnel to extend the growing season.





## REACH (Racial Equity Action Committee for Health)



REACH is an integral part of the work at Blue Cross to advance racial and health equity. It is our driving vehicle to set about eliminating the entrenched racial and health inequities. Such inequities stretch across various forms of existence, including internally with our associates, in the business through our members, and externally within our communities across our state, we must address them all to dismantle structural racism.

– **Rosemond Sarpong Owens**  
Director, Racial and Health  
Equity Integration



In the fallout from the killing of George Floyd, and on the back of the mainstream awakening on racism, Blue Cross sought to further its commitments to becoming an antiracist organization by creating REACH (Racial Equity Action Committee for Health). The committee, made up of Blue Cross associates, leverages different perspectives and strengths so that outcomes are rooted in achievement and affiliation rather than power, and continually raise our gaze beyond an organizational mindset to ensure alignment with the most impactful outcomes in Minnesota’s communities.

REACH applies a health equity lens on initiatives before decisions are made to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are factored in ensuring that all investments and resources being used serve our communities and associates, mitigate bias and bridge the barriers that cause health inequities, and address systemic racism in policies and practices. The committee platform is also important so that Blue Cross can raise our voices loudly, clearly and constantly in contempt of racism, hate and discrimination.

Already, REACH has been able to contribute several powerful community initiatives, partnering with community organizations and providers on solutions to advance racial and health equity in our state. TurnSignal and the presidential scholarship program at Minnesota State University—Mankato are two such initiatives summarized on the following page.

## TurnSignl

One in every 1,000 Black men will die at the hands of law enforcement ([Edwards, Lee, and Esposito 2019](#).) In addition, police violence is a leading cause of death for Black men ages 25 to 29. These statistics, along with the 2016 murder of Philando Castile and 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers during routine stops, brought the need for a solution that Jazz Hampton, Esq., Andre Creighton and Mychal Frelix have created through their app TurnSignl.

The innovative **app provides on-demand legal advice connecting the user to an attorney specifically trained to de-escalate interactions between police, driver, and passengers** if they are stopped by law enforcement. The goal is to de-escalate encounters between motorists and law enforcement and ensure that drivers have their rights protected, and that everyone, including law enforcement, feels safe.

Blue Cross is funding TurnSignl as part of a five-year engagement strategy with the city of Brooklyn Center to improve racial and health equity citywide.



This new pilot program will provide up to **3,000 Brooklyn Center residents free access** to the TurnSignl app

## Minnesota State University—Mankato Presidential Scholarships

Together with Minnesota State University – Mankato, we **funded 24 Blue Cross Presidential Scholarships over seven years** to support the next generation of Minnesota’s workforce.

The funding will ideally support undergraduate students studying all majors in education; pre-law; criminal justice; political science; social work; cultural and multi-ethnic studies; nursing; health science; health informatics; and biochemistry. It also dedicates resources for Minnesota State Mankato’s Undergraduate Research Center, providing even more robust supports for students to build mentoring relationships that enable them to participate in research, scholarship and creative activities.

Our aspiration is for these scholarships to help build more career pathways for BIPOC health care practitioners, culturally competent care providers and future changemakers across all our communities.





# COVID-19 RELIEF





# COVID-19 relief

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the health inequities faced by BIPOC communities in undeniable ways. Throughout all stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Blue Cross has worked to increase rates of vaccination, provide equitable access to testing, and care for our communities most impacted by health inequities and hit hardest by COVID-19.



Increasing equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and providing emergency COVID-19 relief funding are critical components of our work to care for our communities most impacted by health inequities. Decades of systemic racism, lack of access to quality health care, and existing economic and health inequities have left these communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

– **Mark Steffen**, *Senior Vice President, Medical Management and Chief Medical Officer*





## Cost-share waiver for COVID-19 treatment

As part of its ongoing effort to increase access to necessary care while minimizing the impact of COVID-19, Blue Cross extended no-cost coverage for all in-network COVID-19 treatment – including office visits and hospitalizations – through the remainder of the Public Health Emergency in 2021.

The cost-share waiver applied to all members in fully insured commercial plans, which encompass thousands of small to large businesses throughout the state; Minnesotans who purchase Blue Cross coverage on their own; and seniors enrolled in Medicare.



## Marnita's Table

Marnita's Table facilitated community listening sessions designed to amplify the voices of those most impacted by systemic racism and identify opportunities for Blue Cross to make equitable change.

In 2021, Marnita's Table and Blue Cross specifically focused on ways to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in BIPOC and low-income communities.



Marnita's Table hosted a listening tour called **"Let's Talk COVID Conversations."**

Listening sessions addressed best practices on building trust in COVID-19 vaccines, effective ways to communicate public health information, and solutions to health inequities.

Additionally, Blue Cross created an internal cross functional workgroup tasked with brainstorming the findings from Marnita's Table. The objective of this workgroup was to discuss how we can best respond to the findings and effectively address community needs.





## COVID-19 mobile vaccination buses

When Minnesota started to roll out its statewide COVID-19 vaccination strategy, a strong focus was put on equitable and fair distribution. This focus aligned with the goal of increasing vaccination rates among BIPOC Minnesotans. It also recognized the reality that eligibility for a COVID-19 vaccine didn't always come with ease of access to a vaccine location.

To help ensure fair and equitable vaccine distribution throughout all Minnesota communities, Blue Cross teamed up with the Minnesota Department of Health, the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit to transform a fleet of buses into mobile vaccination clinics.

375 Blue Cross associates spent part of their spring and summer volunteering in both clinical and non-clinical roles, vaccinating as many as 150 people per visit.



Our thanks go out to the community partners, state agencies, and each and every volunteer who stepped up to be part of this historic volunteer effort.

– **Susan Schuster**  
Principal Community Relations Consultant

[READ MORE](#)

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



# ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION





# Access to quality early education

Access to quality early childhood care and education plays a key role in future health. Research shows that what happens in the first five years of life closely correlates with lifelong health outcomes and health care expenses. That's why the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation has invested so significantly in early childhood care and education for the past 20 years.



PHOTO: Northland Foundation



Early childhood care and education is a key driver of lifelong health. When families have access to quality early care, children experience better health from childhood into adulthood, and it's well established that structural racism impacts both access to and quality of early childhood care and education. Prioritizing early care and education benefits Minnesota children and our health care system.

– **Allison Corrado**, Senior Program Officer,  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota  
Foundation







## Healthy Community Initiative

The Blue Cross Foundation and its community partners employ several strategies to expand access to early childhood care and education.

One grantee partner, the Healthy Community Initiative (HCI) in Northfield, focuses on grassroots community organizing for systemic change. Rooted in its community, HCI works to increase access to early childhood education and care for low-income families throughout Rice County, primarily from Latine and Somali communities. With Foundation support, HCI connects children with high-quality early childhood programs, connects households to childhood screenings that increase kindergarten readiness, and engages with parents and providers to understand social determinants of health. They also deliver timely information, resources and training to local child care providers and support educational opportunities for diverse child care providers – all while promoting local and statewide policy changes that ensure existing systems work for all kids and families.



## Wildflower Foundation

Supporting child care providers is an essential part of increasing access to quality early childhood care and education throughout the state. Providers are key partners in providing quality child care to children, but they often do not receive the supports and resources they need.

The Blue Cross Foundation partners with numerous community organizations to support providers, such as the Wildflower Foundation and its ongoing Equity Initiative. This initiative is centered specifically on the Black community and supporting emerging Black early childhood teachers. This includes providing ongoing assistance to teachers opening their own Montessori programs, which will increase access to high quality, culturally relevant early childhood care and education among Black, Indigenous and children of color and low-income communities.

[LEARN MORE](#)





# SAFE AND WELCOMING COMMUNITIES





# Safe and welcoming communities

Communities experience positive health outcomes when everyone feels safe and are meaningfully included in decisions that affect their lives. The opposite is also true, as violence, fear of violence and chronic stress negatively impact health. The Blue Cross Foundation works to help create and nurture more connected, resilient and inclusive communities.



When people feel secure and connected in their community, they are free from fear, violence and toxic stress. Strong social connections and feeling safe are key determinants of positive health outcomes. Our grantee partnerships nurture more connected, resilient and inclusive communities where all people have the support and resources they deserve to reach their full health potential.

– **Claire Chang**, Senior Program Officer,  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota  
Foundation





## Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL)

The Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL) is a longtime partner of the Blue Cross Foundation.

One effort supported by the Foundation is CAAL's ongoing **Paths Forward on Safe and Welcoming Communities** project, an initiative focused on the needs of Asian American immigrants, refugees and their families.

Supported by the Foundation since 2019, this initiative addresses rising anti-immigrant sentiment and growing political threats while providing critical programs serving immigrants. The effort builds leadership and centers the community's voice to ensure that systems (such as service providers, institutions and policies) are responsive to their needs, particularly amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and a local and national climate of anti-Asian rhetoric, biases and attacks, which have profoundly impacted CAAL and its initiatives.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Hope Community

People thrive in communities that are safe, connected and inclusive. Hope Community in Minneapolis creates connections that strengthen the power of community members, and, with funding support from the Blue Cross Foundation, Hope continues its legacy of community engagement, research and training to create safe and welcoming communities.

In 2021, this funding supported Hope's efforts to develop a Sanctuary Organization Model – a meeting place where all people can be safe from threats of deportation or other legal action – as an alternative method of public safety. Through this project, Hope trains staff, community and board members on social justice, healing methods, policy change and development, conducts listening sessions with community on safe and welcoming communities and policy barriers, and updates existing policies and procedures to align with community needs.

[LEARN MORE](#)



## Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly

After nearly a year of extreme isolation, we knew that many seniors were struggling with loneliness. We wanted to make seniors feel special and loved.

Through our partnership with Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, we collaborated to focus on Valentine’s Day 2021. More than 70 Blue Cross associates made over 900 valentines. This means that each elder involved in the program received multiple creative and heartfelt valentines.

To continue the partnership beyond Valentine’s Day, we developed a new volunteer initiative—Quarterly Card Connect. By September 2021, 89 volunteers served 381 seniors each quarter with a seasonal card and reminder that they matter.



We focus so much on the younger generation that we forget about the seniors in our lives. As volunteers, we are there to engage with them, bring them some joy, laughter, happiness—it gives them a sense of security, a place.

– **Andrea Gates**  
Senior Business Systems Consultant



[READ MORE](#)



# ACCESS TO COVERAGE



# Access to coverage

Approximately 264,000 Minnesotans are without health care coverage, creating significant barriers to timely, quality care. The Blue Cross Foundation works to increase health care coverage across Minnesota by partnering with nonprofits throughout the state – to help people who are eligible for public program coverage under Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare and to increase awareness about the communities most impacted by a lack of health care access.



**Approximately 264,000 Minnesotans are without health care coverage**



PHOTO: Immigrant Development Center



Access to health care coverage is crucial to the health of our communities. Uninsured people are far more likely to delay health care or go without it entirely – the effects of which can be devastating. That’s why we focus on connecting communities to the support and care they need in order to increase health care coverage across Minnesota.

– **Carolyn Link**, *President Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation*





## Gender Care and Service

Facing discrimination and barriers to health care is a common experience in the transgender and non-binary community. Systemic issues, like a lack of experienced providers, barriers to accessing coverage for gender-affirming care and a lack of research on gender-diverse people, lead to inequitable health outcomes.

This initiative includes efforts to ensure we are getting it right on the inside through our policies, procedures and role as an employer, and in the services we provide to our members. This includes care guidance provided by our Gender Services Consultant, who is dedicated to helping our transgender and non-binary members and their families navigate their health plan benefits and the broader health care system.



## Seeds of Justice

Geographical areas with high rates of uninsurance are considered hot spots. Through Foundation-funded research from the University of Minnesota, several of these hot spots have been identified throughout the state – including in Worthington, where more than 10 percent of the community lacks health care coverage.

As a result of both this research and the needs directly identified by the community, the Foundation partnered with Seeds of Justice, a trusted community-based organization focused on connecting communities, advocating for resources and creating safe spaces for Worthington residents. The Foundation provides support to Seeds of Justice as it engages with community members to better understand barriers to accessing health care and connect community members with available resources.

[LEARN MORE](#)





## Center for Advancing Serious Illness Communication

The Center for Advancing Serious Illness Communication (C-ASIC) is a joint initiative by the Minnesota Hospital Association (MHA) and the Minnesota Medical Association (MMA).



**Blue Cross invested \$750,000 to fund three years of this new program**

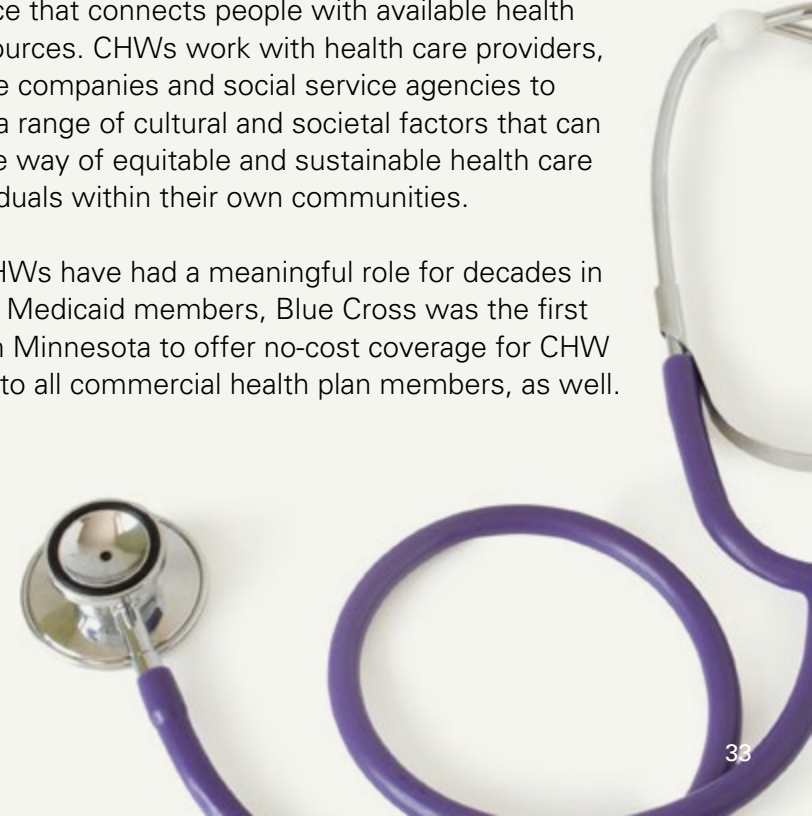
In February 2021, Blue Cross invested \$750,000 to fund three years of this new program, which will work to address known gaps in care delivery for patients with serious and terminal conditions and drive systemic change by enabling them to make well-informed decisions as their illness progresses. Through more effective conversations with health care providers and customized system workflows, the program is designed to train clinicians in how to have more timely, specific and meaningful conversations with patients about their treatment and care preferences.

## Community Health Workers

As our communities become increasingly diverse, removing language and cultural barriers that stand in the way of good health becomes even more essential.

Community health workers – often referred to as CHWs – are trusted frontline public health professionals who provide culturally appropriate education and assistance that connects people with available health care resources. CHWs work with health care providers, insurance companies and social service agencies to address a range of cultural and societal factors that can get in the way of equitable and sustainable health care for individuals within their own communities.

While CHWs have had a meaningful role for decades in assisting Medicaid members, Blue Cross was the first insurer in Minnesota to offer no-cost coverage for CHW services to all commercial health plan members, as well.





# REDUCING COMMERCIAL TOBACCO USE





# Reducing commercial tobacco use

Blue Cross remains committed to reducing commercial tobacco\* use in Minnesota communities most impacted by tobacco-related health inequities.

Our work aims to reduce commercial tobacco use by supporting community-driven, culturally-specific efforts that raise awareness, shift cultural and social norms, and influence organizational and local public policy.

NOTE: Commercial tobacco in this document refers specifically to the use of commercially manufactured tobacco products, and not to the sacred, medicinal and traditional use of tobacco by American Indians and other groups.



We're committed to reducing commercial tobacco use in Minnesota because it continues to be the leading cause of preventable death and disease across the state. We're committed because the tobacco industry continually targets Black, Indigenous and communities of color, and our goal is for every person to be free from commercial tobacco's harms and to reach their highest health potential.

– Janelle Waldock, Senior Director, Policy





## Quit the Hit

Rescue Agency launched the Quit the Hit program, an innovative 30-day behavior change campaign that provides young adults with a socially-connected platform on Instagram. It is designed to engage and empower participants to learn how to quit vaping. A tailored online program was created to directly reach LGBTQ+ and other young adults who are at a disproportionate risk for vape use within the state. In 2021, there were 12 active groups with 206 participants total.



**12 active groups with a total of 206 participants**



## Association for Nonsmokers Minnesota (ANSR)

ANSR led advocacy efforts resulting in the successful adoption of St. Paul's price discounting policy. On November 3, 2021, the St. Paul City Council voted unanimously to prohibit the use of coupons and price promotions for commercial tobacco and vaping products. The measure is part of a commercial tobacco ordinance that also sets a \$10 minimum price for cigarette packs and standard-size cans of smokeless tobacco, increases penalties for retailers who sell commercial tobacco to people under age 21 and restricts liquor stores from selling menthol and other flavored tobacco products. The policy is one of the most comprehensive in the nation.

[LEARN MORE](#)

# Minnesotans for a Smoke-free Generation

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of Minnesota organizations that share the common goal of saving Minnesota youth from a lifetime of addiction to commercial tobacco.

The coalition is co-chaired by Blue Cross and made up of more than 50 organizations. In the 2021 legislative session the coalition successfully **advocated for a \$4 million dollar annual budget appropriation to the Minnesota Department of Health to focus on youth commercial tobacco prevention.** This critical funding is invested in community-led strategies to reduce commercial tobacco use in our state, especially in those communities that are heavily targeted by the tobacco industry and already most negatively impacted by racial and health inequities.

[LEARN MORE](#)





# ACCESS TO HEALTHY EATING



# Access to healthy eating

Addressing health inequities and food insecurity in Minnesota has been a fundamental part of our work, and it will remain at the forefront of our efforts. We understand that multiple approaches are needed to help support opportunities for healthy eating. By collaborating with communities, engaging health and food experts, and promoting better policies, we believe we can help to create a healthier Minnesota where all residents have the opportunity and access to choose healthy options.



We're committed to increasing access to equitable and healthy eating because many of the leading chronic health conditions have strong, undeniable links to what we eat. Knowing this, we believe that one key to creating a healthier state is to ensure that all Minnesotans can select healthy and culturally relevant foods for themselves and their families.

– **Vayong Moua**, *Director, Health Equity Advocacy*





## Hmong American Farmers Association

The Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) engaged 14 Hmong in-home childcare providers to increase their use and consumption of culturally appropriate produce and increase their enrollment in federal assistance programs. Additionally, they worked with 38 farmers to adopt food safety plans to ensure safe handling and storage of foods.



## Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio

Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES) increased SNAP outreach, education and participation of immigrant Latino families in the Twin Cities and Austin, Minnesota. Through social media efforts, it reached 30,611 potential clients per quarter and enrolled 61. It leveraged communities' engagement in the food shelf as a strategy to address SNAP barriers and myths. In addition, CLUES had 23 community garden plots and worked with 27 Latino families to produce over 1,000 pounds of food. CLUES supported families to grow their own food in the garden and held eight workshops focused on the food system and Latino contributions to it. The gardeners and community leaders from this project identified four policies to increase land access and access to healthy foods in 2022.

[LEARN MORE](#)







## Blue Cross community giving gardens

Launched in 2008, the Giving Garden gives associates the opportunity to help grow fresh produce on the Blue Cross campuses in Eagan and Virginia. The produce is then donated to local food pantries.

During the 2021 season, more than 100 associates volunteered their time and talents in the gardens, growing more than 720 pounds of produce at the Eagan campus and more than 300 pounds at the Virginia campus. That produce was donated to the Open Door Food Pantry in Eagan, the Department of Indian Work in St. Paul, the Quad Cities Food Shelf and the Salvation Army Food Shelf in northern Minnesota.



## MN FoodShare Campaign

Food shelves across the country, and in Minnesota, have been stretched to their limits as they make sure people have access to healthy food for themselves and their families. This is especially true in BIPOC communities, which have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Blue Cross associates responded generously to these ongoing needs by donating to the annual Minnesota FoodShare Campaign. Held each spring, the campaign works to increase access to healthy food.

Associates donated \$80,725 to support Minnesota food shelves during the 2021 campaign. With a matching contribution from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, it raised a grand total of \$161,450.

[READ MORE](#)





## Second Harvest Heartland and Project Well

Blue Cross collaborated with Second Harvest Heartland and Project Well to study the impact of comprehensive dietary support on maternal and infant health outcomes. The research project recruited pregnant Black and Indigenous Blue Plus members with indicators linked to high-risk pregnancy to participate and receive up to seven months of nutrition benefits and services. The program considered the nutritional needs of the whole household, including other children, and tracked maternal and infant health outcomes, as well as total cost of care.





# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY





# Physical activity

We believe people are happier and more active in communities that are welcoming and offer convenient opportunities for them to walk, bike and play. At Blue Cross, we are investing to create change at a community level to make it possible for people to have what they need in their communities to support them to be active and well.



We're committed to addressing deeply entrenched barriers which prevent people from being active within their own communities. By supporting community-driven, culturally relevant efforts to advance equitable policies, systems and environments, we believe we can build a healthier Minnesota.

– **Sarah Senseman**, *Director, Tobacco Settlement Operations and Community Funding*



## Our Streets Minneapolis

Our Streets Minneapolis focuses on changing systems in the transportation planning process from the current “top-down” approach to one that centers and highlights the needs of those most marginalized in the community. They successfully led a campaign for Hennepin County commissioners to approve the Lyndale Avenue 4 to 3 lane conversion, which will significantly improve pedestrian safety in the area.



## The Alliance

The Alliance adapted their work to focus on keeping renters in place during the pandemic’s public health and economic crisis. They worked with partner organizations to advocate for the extension of the statewide eviction moratorium, increased financial assistance to address housing instability, and worked with local elected officials on policies and advocacy efforts.

## Safe Routes to School

We support coalitions that aim to increase active living opportunities for people of all abilities. The Safe Routes to School Network supports practitioners to plan and implement equitable safe routes initiatives at the state, regional, and local level—keeping kids safe throughout Minnesota.



# CHANGING THE NARRATIVE



# Changing the narrative

To further address the racial and health inequities in Minnesota, we need a complete view on health, one that is told by storytellers reflecting the communities they are from. Lifting up these voices and stories is critical to better understanding our world, develop empathy, and will expand the way the dominant culture thinks about and views health.

At Blue Cross, we are seeking to change narratives, diversify and expand audience demographics and empower a new generation of changemakers to tell their stories—vital for healthy, thriving Minnesota communities.

The following projects strategically foster and support storytellers from the communities experiencing the greatest racial and health inequities—producing leaders who hold the solutions to the many challenges we face.



We're committed to changing the dominant narrative on health because the current narrative originates from a singular perspective—a mainstream white perspective. To truly address racial and health inequities, we need the storytellers and the stories told to reflect the communities they are from, centering their narratives, told through their perspectives, and illustrating the diverse cultures and communities that help our state thrive.

– **Christian Knights**, *Manager, Strategic Communications*



## ThreeSixty Journalism TV broadcast camp

ThreeSixty Journalism and the Center for Prevention hosted their fourth annual TV broadcast camp for high school students in July 2021.

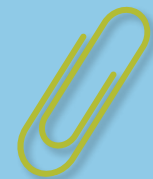
The one-week camp gave diverse students from across the Twin Cities a chance to learn the ins and outs of TV broadcasting from some of the industry's leading professionals, develop their skills as journalists and explore topics related to health equity. The camp aims to empower the next generation of storytellers and change the dominant narrative on health.

The theme of this year's camp was **Racism as a Public Health Crisis**. Students reported on a variety of topics related to the generational impacts of racism on community health and community-led solutions to health inequities.



We're humbled to work with such talented young journalists to illuminate how racism directly impacts health, while giving them the experiences to lead the next generation in liberatory and equitable storytelling.

– **Bukata Hayes**  
Vice President, Racial and Health Equity





## Minneapolis Institute of Art collaborative

Partnering with the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Mia), Blue Cross launched a multi-generational project that addressed racism and health through the power of art. This collaborative program used art to visualize the concept of racism as a health crisis. Students from Minneapolis North High School, Como Park Senior High School in St. Paul and Minnesota Transitions Charter School in Minneapolis, were mentored by local Twin Cities BIPOC artists to create their own artwork focused on how racism impacts their lives and the health of their families and communities.

Artwork created by students and their mentors –Kprecia Ambers, Nancy Ariza, Juan Lucero and Akiko Ostlund — were displayed at Mia in an exhibition titled **Racism as a Public Health Crisis**.



## Partnership with the Sahan Journal

There are consequences when the dominant narrative only reflects a sliver of the broader population. That's why we are committed to changing the dominant narrative and supporting efforts to represent the communities we serve more inclusively and accurately.

Our partnership with the Sahan Journal is one example of this commitment. In 2021, the Sahan Journal published more than a dozen commentaries written by Blue Cross staff and leadership, many of whom identify as Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian Pacific Islander or other community of color. Topics included:

- A reflection on Juneteenth
- Intergenerational trauma among Indigenous communities, including the devastating impact of residential boarding schools and mass executions
- Thoughts on AAPI Heritage Month
- What intersectionality means for LGBTQ+ rights
- The realities of anti-transgender violence
- How structural racism impacts access to early childhood care and education
- The current state of the vaping epidemic



# Community Giving Campaign

Each fall, the Blue Cross Community Giving Campaign encourages associates to donate to their favorite nonprofits. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation provided a matching contribution for each donation made.

**The 2021 campaign, which wrapped up October 6, raised more than \$1.09 million between associate donations, Foundation matches and an online auction.**

As part of the Community Giving Campaign, Blue Cross designates a handful of organizations to be featured nonprofits. The missions of these organizations focus on both racial and health equity and on social determinants of health – two initiatives that align with Blue Cross’ company goals. Racial and health equity-based nonprofits were eligible for a 150 percent Foundation match. Featured nonprofits focusing on social determinants of health received a 100 percent Foundation match. All other nonprofits received a 50 percent Foundation match from associate donations.

## Featured nonprofits included:

- Project Care Free Clinic
- Voices for Racial Justice
- Hallie Q. Brown Community Center
- YWCA Minneapolis
- Northpoint Health & Wellness Center
- Hope Community
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency
- Access North
- Dream of Wild Health
- Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability
- Mesabi Family YMCA
- Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity
- North St. Louis County Habitat for Humanity
- Urban Roots



By raising over \$1 million for charity, we are supporting our communities when they need us most, by impacting racial and health equity, and furthering our mission to inspire change, transform care and improve health.

– **Bukata Hayes**  
Vice President, Racial and Health Equity



# THE JOURNEY ONWARD





# A note from Bukata Hayes

*Vice President Racial and Health Equity*

Our health is more than just preventing and treating our illnesses—it’s addressing the root causes that are truly undermining the health of Minnesotans and many of our communities. At Blue Cross, we’re on a journey to listen and learn, and then play our part in the solutions. We know that we can do better, not only as Blue Cross, but also as a state and a nation when it comes to addressing structural racism and the inequities it has caused for generations. Communities hold the answers to the challenges they face. As an organization, we’re investing in community-led solutions, working to build trust and partnering with those community organizations leading the work.

Racial and health equity does not exist in a vacuum. It’s an endeavor that cuts across all lines of business, all backgrounds, all identities and affinity groups. We all have a role to play. We are living through an incredibly polarized time, and racialized politics have become front, center and constant. An integral part of this work is for people to be able to confidently and courageously say that race and racism matter. We will not “nice” our way through this difficult time. We must deal with the racial realities of our current circumstance. Unfortunately, conflicts rooted in race and racism will continue to occur throughout our society. Part of the labor required by all of us, in this moment, is to build up individual and collective consciousness about these issues, build relationships that are strong enough to sustain us in these times and work together toward resolutions.

One of the most important things to remember is that we are trying to achieve things that don’t have a specific endpoint. We have never experienced a truly racially just existence. Things like becoming an antiracist organization and advancing racial and health equity are endeavors that will take years, even generations. The inequities and impacts of racism have been building for centuries. Hundreds of years of hardening won’t be undone with one chisel and one hammer—or in one quarter or calendar year.

As we look back at 2021, we have to view our work and achievements as part of a process and a journey—not an endpoint. An even more equitable future is possible in 2022. As an organization, we’re deeply committed to listening, learning and actively working to center equity, respect and justice in our efforts to create a healthier future for all Minnesotans.

**Bukata Hayes**

Vice President, Racial and Health Equity





# The board of trustees

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota operates under the governance and guidance of a corporate board of trustees, composed of some of Minnesota's most accomplished and diverse leaders in the business, nonprofit and health care communities. The board's role is to ensure that Blue Cross fulfills its purpose as a nonprofit health service plan corporation. The board also ensures that the organization works with its various stakeholders: members, regulators, legislators, providers and the general public. Board members strive to set an example for nonpublic companies.

**Dana Erickson**, President and CEO, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

**Michael R. Robinson**, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Life Time Fitness (retired)

**Jan K. Angell**, Vice President, Total Rewards, 3M Company (retired)

**Melissa Barra**, Senior Vice President, Chief Strategy and Customer Relationship Officer, Sleep Number

**Walter T. Chesley, JD**, Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer, Hennepin County Medical Center (retired)

**Judi H. Dutcher**, Executive Director, Bentson Foundation

**Paul J. Gam**, Chairman and CEO of Zurich Medical Inc.

**Michael S. Jones**, Senior Executive Vice President, Huntington National Bank

**Pamela J. Moret**, President and CEO, Brightpeak Financial (retired)

**Jeffrey Kang, M.D.**, Founding CEO of WellBe Senior Medical

**Teddy Bekele**, Senior Vice President, Chief Technology Officer, Land O'Lakes, Inc.

**Emily Piper, JD**, Executive Director, Government Relations & Contracting, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

**Patrick Milan**, Chief Insights Officer, Tunheim

**Bryan Phillips**, Senior Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary, and Chief Compliance Officer for Inspire Medical Systems, Inc.

*Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® of Minnesota and Blue Plus® are nonprofit independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.*