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HBCAT Shows Measurable Progress in Bourbon County Health Indicators Over Time

Ten years of sustained community work are producing measurable improvements in tobacco use, nutrition, and healthy-weight indicators

FORT SCOTT, Kan. - August 2026 - Ten years after Bourbon County received its first Pathways to a Healthy Kansas grant, long-term data are showing measurable progress in several of the health priorities the Healthy Bourbon County Action Team has worked to address since 2016.

Bourbon County is seeing measurable signs of improved health, with fewer adults smoking, fewer adults classified as overweight, and more adults reporting that they eat fruits and vegetables at least once each day.

Heather Smith, then economic development director for the City of Fort Scott, and **Jody Love**, then community benefit lead at Mercy Hospital Fort Scott, worked together to write Bourbon County's successful 2016 application for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas® (BCBSKS) Pathways to a Healthy Kansas (Pathways) grant.

The application was informed by Bourbon County's Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan, both written by Love during her work at Mercy Hospital. Local data identified tobacco use, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, chronic disease, and limited access to healthy choices as significant community concerns.

Following the award, Love established and led the Healthy Bourbon County Action Team to implement the Pathways initiative and build the lasting community infrastructure needed to carry the work forward.

At the time of the application, Bourbon County ranked near the bottom of Kansas counties for overall health outcomes. The original grant called for long-term policy, environmental, and systems changes that would make healthy choices easier and more accessible for residents.

LONG-TERM INDICATOR MOVEMENT

Indicator	Earlier value	Latest value	Change
Adults who smoke	21.2% 2018	16.9% 2023	More than 20% reduction
Consuming fruit less than once daily	44.7% 2017	42.1% 2021	About 6% improvement
Consuming vegetables less than once daily	22.9% 2017	21.1% 2021	About 8% improvement
Adults classified as overweight	36.6% 2017	26.6% 2021	More than 27% reduction

Lower percentages represent improvement for the fruit and vegetable indicators because they measure the percentage of adults consuming those foods less than once per day.

"When Heather and I wrote the Pathways grant in 2016, we knew meaningful community change would not happen quickly. We have been through hospital closure, leadership transitions, funding challenges, a pandemic, and countless changes in our community. Through it all, we kept building relationships, listening to residents, using data, and working to change the systems and environments that shape health. Ten years later, we are seeing the fruit of that hard work."

- Jody Love, President and CEO, Healthy Bourbon County Action Team

The original grant application envisioned increased access to healthy food, safer places for physical activity, greater youth and community engagement, stronger cross-sector relationships, and a community culture in which the healthy choice could become the easier choice.

That early work developed into a broader and sustained effort addressing community health, food access, active living, tobacco prevention, economic mobility, entrepreneurship, and quality of life. HBCAT created a structure through which residents and organizations could continue working together beyond a single grant or funding cycle.

Over the past decade, HBCAT has worked with residents and organizations across healthcare, education, economic development, local government, business, and the nonprofit sector. Individual partners and levels of participation have changed over time, but HBCAT has remained focused on the long-term vision established in 2016.

Population-level outcomes are affected by many factors and cannot be attributed to one grant or organization alone. However, the alignment between the priorities identified in 2016, nearly a decade of sustained policy, environmental, and systems-change work, and improvement in several long-term indicators provides strong evidence that HBCAT and Bourbon County's broader community efforts have contributed to meaningful change.

"Pathways to a Healthy Kansas is grounded in the belief that better health starts long before someone needs medical care. By investing in partnerships, supporting local leadership and addressing the factors that shape health, BCBSKS is helping create lasting change across Kansas communities," said Virginia Barnes, director of Blue Health Initiatives. "The health improvements we are seeing after a decade of partnership with the Healthy Bourbon County Action Team reflect our belief that real change happens through local leadership, strong relationships and sustained commitment."

"The numbers matter, but so does what it took to move them," Love said. "This progress represents years of persistence from staff, residents, volunteers, businesses, organizations, policymakers, and funders who believed Bourbon County could become a healthier place. We still have significant work ahead of us, but we should also pause and recognize that sustained community investment can produce measurable results."

The original 2016 Pathways application stated that Bourbon County was ready to pursue work that would have "meaningful impact and measurable outcomes." Ten years later, the community can demonstrate progress toward that promise.

Data cited are from Kansas Health Matters. Available measurement years vary by indicator. The fruit, vegetable, overweight, and adult-smoking indicators referenced here are archived indicators and should be considered alongside local program, policy, and systems-change evidence.

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ABOUT THE HEALTHY BOURBON COUNTY ACTION TEAM

The Healthy Bourbon County Action Team works to increase access to healthy food and physical activity, promote commercial tobacco prevention and cessation, enhance quality of life, and support economic growth. HBCAT advances community-driven solutions through resident engagement, cross-sector relationships, resource development, and policy, environmental, and systems change.

ABOUT PATHWAYS TO A HEALTHY KANSAS

Pathways to a Healthy Kansas is the largest community grant program ever funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas. The Pathways program provides community coalitions with the tools and resources needed to remove barriers and engage their communities in ways that improve active living, healthy eating, behavioral health and commercial tobacco prevention. The grant funding for each community includes a coordination grant along with the opportunity to apply for non-competitive implementation and achievements grants. For more information, visit bcbks.com/pathways.

ABOUT BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF KANSAS

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