

2024

Community Report



HIGHMARK

BrightBlueFutures

community · health · resilience

A Year in Review

In 2024, Highmark Health and its affiliates significantly expanded our steadfast commitment to community well-being, investing over \$53 million in corporate and foundation giving across Pennsylvania, Delaware, West Virginia, and New York.

Building upon a strong legacy of support, this investment fueled impactful initiatives through the Highmark Bright Blue Futures program. A key highlight of 2024 was the Highmark Bright Blue Futures Awards, made possible by the Highmark Foundation, expanding to include a thought leadership forum that offered nonprofits the opportunity to dive deeper into how to move the needle on health equity. Additionally, strategic partnerships with key nonprofit organizations, particularly in southeastern Pennsylvania, continue to deepen, reflecting Highmark Health’s continued dedication to the individuals, families, and communities we serve throughout our footprint.

Our approach is uniquely tailored to address the individual needs of each community, focusing on improving equitable access to health care and enhancing quality of life, with the overarching goal of strengthening the health and resilience of our communities.

The collaborative spirit of Highmark Bright Blue Futures, amplifying regional giving and volunteer efforts, is central to our success. Our third community report proudly showcases the inspiring stories, dynamic partnerships, and demonstrable impact of these vital initiatives.



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Highmark Bright Blue Futures Overview

Highmark Bright Blue Futures is our charitable giving and community involvement program, driven by the goal of ensuring healthier, brighter futures for all. The impact of this program — now in its third year — reaches individuals and families across Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia, Delaware, and beyond.

While the goal is simple, the work is complex.

We have a long history of collaborating with community organizations, health care providers, and volunteers, leveraging our collective expertise and resources to drive impactful change. Each year, we deepen our existing relationships and foster new partnerships.

Through our financial contributions, we support critical health programs addressing key challenges in rural and urban areas, while driving initiatives that promote economic stability and community well-being.

We also provide vital resources to organizations working on the ground and actively celebrate their accomplishments, raise public awareness of their important work, and amplify their inspiring stories and collective voices.

The work is far from over, but together — with our partners, volunteers, and the communities we serve — we are building a brighter future for all.



David L. Holmberg

President and CEO
Highmark Health

“Highmark Bright Blue Futures is committed to health equity, expanding access to high-quality care, and creating opportunities for a healthier future. We partner with communities to address disparities and ensure everyone has the chance to thrive, and on behalf of the family of companies at Highmark Health, we are honored to continue building brighter, stronger futures for all through partnerships like those highlighted in this report.”

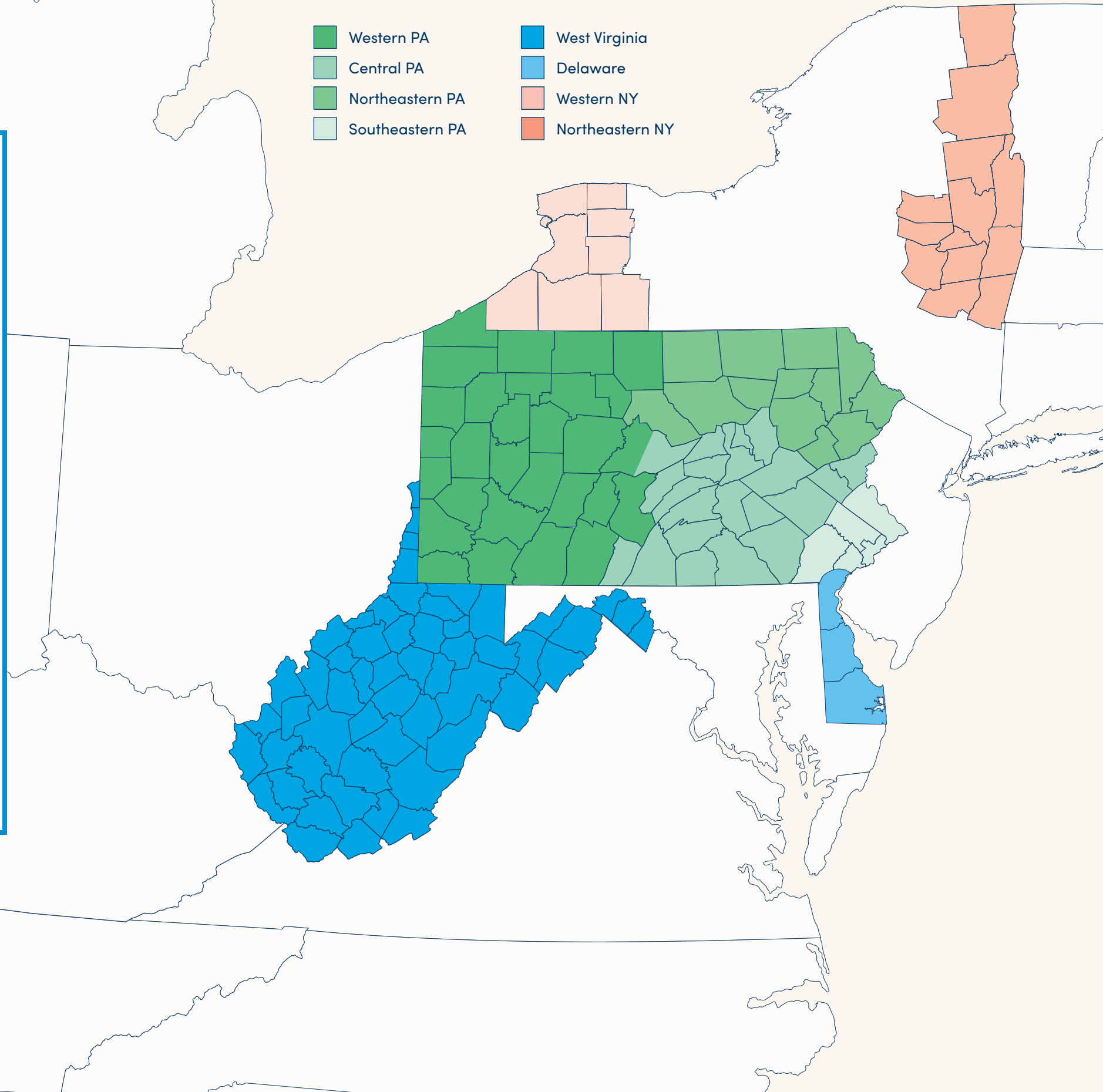
About Highmark

As the fourth-largest Blue Cross Blue Shield affiliated organization, Highmark Inc. and its Blue-branded affiliates proudly cover the insurance needs of approximately 7 million members in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, and West Virginia. Its diversified businesses serve group, customer, and individual needs across the United States through dental insurance and other related businesses, offering high-quality, accessible, understandable, and affordable experiences, outcomes, and solutions.

For more information, visit [highmark.com](https://www.highmark.com).

Service Map

- Western PA
- Central PA
- Northeastern PA
- Southeastern PA
- West Virginia
- Delaware
- Western NY
- Northeastern NY



SECTION 1

Community Health

Highmark Bright Blue Futures is aggressively tackling health inequities through a five-pronged community health strategy focused on access to care, economic stability for individuals and families, social and community context, education access, and neighborhood and built environment.

Over the past three years, we've expanded our reach, developed targeted programs to improve health outcomes, and forged partnerships that provide more people access to basic needs, reliable transportation, higher education and training, and mental and physical health care.

Our unwavering commitment to equitable health outcomes drives all our strategic planning and future initiatives.



Access to Care

Limited access to quality health care disproportionately affects many communities, particularly those in rural areas or with low incomes. These populations often face significant infrastructural, financial, and geographic barriers.

We are working to lessen these inequities by expanding access to preventive care, such as dental exams; providing better support and resources for specific diseases, like diabetes and asthma; and empowering our community members to better manage their health.

This year alone, we estimate that our support has provided access to care, including vision, dental, and preventive services; screenings; and vaccinations to more than 25,000 individuals.



One Pint of Blood, Multiple Lives Saved

A story of gratitude and urgent need

“Your donation helped keep my husband alive while he recovered from a kidney transplant. Our children will grow up with their daddy thanks to you.”

These words, penned by a grateful wife, capture the life-saving impact of a single blood donation.

Do you know that only 3% of eligible people donate blood in the United States? It’s no wonder we face a critical blood shortage in our hospitals.

Imagine a young mother battling leukemia, her life hanging in the balance, dependent on the generosity of strangers. Or a child injured in a car accident, needing blood to survive the night. These are not hypothetical scenarios; they are the daily realities of our nation’s hospitals.

In fact, according to the American Red Cross, someone needs blood and/or platelets every two seconds.

We are invested in helping with this urgent need for blood by supporting community blood banks in their efforts to recruit and retain donors. Our partnerships with the Miller-Keystone Blood Center (MKBC) in the Lehigh Valley and The Community Blood Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania and Western New York are vital to sustaining these lifesaving services.

MKBC, serving 18 counties and 35 hospitals, faces a constant struggle to meet the overwhelming demand. Chief Operating Officer Rami Nemeh, explains, “We need 350 donations every single day just to keep up. Cancer patients rely on us heavily.”

Similarly, The Community Blood Bank of NWPA and WNY supports 16 hospitals and seven STAT MedEvac bases, requiring 800 weekly donations. Executive Director Deanna Rosenthal reflects on the impact of the pandemic, “Donation rates



plummeted, and we’re working hard to engage younger generations in this life-saving mission.”

We support both blood banks’ annual donor appreciation events. These aren’t mere thank-you gatherings; they’re powerful recruitment tools, showcasing the ease of donation and sharing the deeply personal stories of recipients. Families attend, spreading awareness and creating a ripple effect of generosity.

Lina Barbieri, MKBC’s chief philanthropy officer, emphasizes the transformative impact of personal connection, “Once people see the direct impact their donation can have, they gain a new understanding of the critical need.” Barbieri adds, “If just 1% more of eligible people donated, the impact on the shortage would be immense.”

At the Community Blood Bank’s Donor Appreciation Day, their largest donation day, approximately 150 donors roll up their sleeves. MKBC’s appreciation series recognizes extraordinary donors, including 13 individuals who have each donated an astounding 100 gallons of

“Your donation helped keep my husband alive while he recovered from a kidney transplant.”

blood. Their dedication exemplifies the incredible power of individual action.

We are proud to support these organizations as they thank existing donors, inspire the next generation of donors and work tirelessly to get more blood on the shelves for all in need.

Healthy Children, Healthy Homes

Empowering families dealing with pediatric asthma

The CDC reports over four million children aged 5 – 18 suffer from asthma, with a staggering 44% experiencing uncontrolled symptoms. This means missed school and work days, strained family finances, and constant worry that hangs heavy in the air. For families juggling work, appointments, and the emotional toll of managing a chronic illness, the burden can feel insurmountable.

In Delaware, Nemours Children’s Health recognized the critical need to address this crisis. In 2022 alone, they treated 3,577 Medicaid pediatric asthma patients, with over 400 requiring emergency room visits — some multiple times.

Recognizing the severity of the situation, Nemours partnered with us to create a lifeline: a comprehensive, 12-month program designed to empower families and significantly improve their children’s health.

Funded by a Highmark Delaware Blueprints for the Community grant, the “Nemours Children’s Health’s Joint Social Determinants of Health — Asthma Solution project,” launched in 2024. This free program tackles the problem head-on, addressing gaps in knowledge, resources, and supportive services. Families are identified through need and referrals, receiving a holistic approach to asthma management.



This isn’t just about medication. It’s about transforming homes into safe havens. Community health workers make in-person and phone visits, conducting detailed Pediatric Environmental Home Assessments to identify and eliminate asthma triggers. Families receive cleaning kits stocked with natural, affordable cleaning agents and learn sustainable cleaning practices. Crucially, the program provides access to HEPA vacuums, air purifiers, and mattress/pillow encasements — tools that directly combat invisible asthma irritants.

The impact is palpable. Hundreds of home visits have already taken place, empowering families with the knowledge and tools to control their children’s asthma. But the story doesn’t end there.

The success of the program has ignited a ripple effect of collaboration, both internally across Nemours Children’s primary care, specialty care, and school-based health programs, and externally, attracting other community partners eager to join the fight.

“We didn’t realize how many organizations would be so interested in helping,” says Gina Hamilton, director, Care Coordination and Community Health Services at Nemours Children’s Health. “They see the value, the long-term impact — it’s not just about asthma; it’s about healthy kids, healthy families, and healthy communities.”

This program isn’t just providing relief; it’s building a future where every child can breathe freely, and every family can thrive.

From Crisis to Community

The Cara House's transformative impact on chronically homeless individuals



Over half a million people experienced homelessness in the United States on a single night in January 2023 according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

In New York, the Bethesda House of Schenectady confronts this crisis daily, welcoming nearly 200 individuals through its doors each day, serving over 4,000 unique individuals annually. For over 30 years, Bethesda House has provided essential services, from meals and medical care to permanent supportive housing. But their commitment goes beyond shelter; it's about building pathways to lasting independence and stability.

"We have always been on the cutting edge of preventing homelessness," said Caroline Codd, development coordinator at the Bethesda House of Schenectady. "We have worked in this community for over 30 years, and we have a deep understanding of what this population needs. We believe housing is a basic human right and it's at the forefront of the work that we do."

Schenectady County's only reentry housing program closed in 2017 due to budget cuts. In December 2023, Bethesda House opened Cara House, a new 42-bed permanent and emergency housing facility funded to address this gap in services.

“We believe housing is a basic human right and it’s at the forefront of the work that we do.”

Along with providing affordable housing, Cara House focuses on reentry, medical care, and education.

"We are helping people work through complex trauma and deep issues like grief," said Codd. "We are using unique services like art and music to work through those traumas. This is optional for residents, but we have seen and heard the impact firsthand."

Patricia (name changed), a resident at Cara House, was incarcerated for 22 years before being released on parole. She came to Bethesda House looking for help with housing, and when she heard Cara House was offering beds specifically for the reentry population, she immediately applied. She says having her own studio apartment after 22 years behind bars is a blessing.

She had been experiencing panic attacks at the quickened pace of the world around her and dreading her trips to her therapist and psychiatrist. Now, at Cara House, she has a team to help manage her schedule and make her appointments.

"The Highmark Blue Fund was our largest benefactor in helping us with our medical program," said Codd. "This funding provided us with a fully staffed and equipped medical office. Before that we were working out of the church basement. We now have all the equipment you would traditionally find in a medical care office, and we can offer comprehensive services in-house."

With the homeless population aging and many over 50, the need for medical care is great. The homeless population shows geriatric symptoms 20 years before the general population.

"This population often cannot get to a doctor on a timely basis," said Codd. "With 90% of these individuals suffering from some kind of physical or mental chronic disability, it's vital they have consistent access to care."

Because of this medical program, patients are no longer waiting weeks or months to get an appointment, and they are building trust with health care providers.

Cara House stands as a testament to the power of comprehensive, compassionate care — transforming lives and strengthening the entire community. It's a model for how to move beyond crisis response to create lasting solutions for chronic homelessness.

Economic Stability for Individuals and Family

Addressing social determinants of health — like economic instability, food insecurity, and housing — is key to unlocking optimal health. These aren't just economic issues; they are fundamental health crises. In 2024, we estimate that we have provided access to basic needs — healthy food, safe housing, and other essential items — to more than 100,000 individuals, improving their well-being and fostering healthier communities.



A Taste of Home, a Harvest of Health

Farmers feeding families

The poignant memory of his father's despair over inadequate food spurred Hamadi Ali on a decades-long quest. Witnessing his family's struggle to access nutritious food in their new Buffalo home ignited a determination to reconnect his community with its agrarian roots. This deeply personal experience became the seed from which Providence Farm Collective (PFC) blossomed.

Born from a three-year pilot project — the Somali Bantu Community Farm — PFC stands as the only nonprofit in western New York directly supporting diverse communities in accessing rural farmland, farming education, and market opportunities.

Kristin Heltman-Weiss, executive director, explains, “The Somali Bantu community possesses deep agricultural knowledge. They were ideally positioned to create a solution to the lack of access to farmland.”

PFC's impact is profound. It's not just about providing food; it's about restoring cultural heritage, fostering economic independence, and improving health outcomes. The organization's programs — including the Incubator Farm, which provides 19 farmers with land, training, and resources; the vibrant Summer Vibe Youth Employment Program; and the nourishing Farmer and Youth Lunch Program — are meticulously

designed to address the interconnected challenges of food insecurity, economic hardship, and cultural displacement. This vital work is made possible in part by the generous support of the Highmark Blue Fund, which is currently supporting PFC's “Feeding Our Community” project.

“Many refugees experience health issues — high blood pressure, diabetes — uncommon in their homelands,” Weiss notes. “The shift from growing their own food to relying on processed foods has a significant impact. Our farmers are helping restore the understanding of food's true value.”

The numbers speak volumes: over 11,000 individuals accessed food from PFC's eight community farms last year, with over 100,000 pounds of produce grown, and 10,330 pounds donated to food pantries. Fifty summer youth employees learn agricultural traditions alongside their families, creating a legacy of sustainable food practices.

But the work isn't finished. Weiss underscores the persistent barriers faced by resettled refugees, often relegated to food deserts lacking access to cultural crops.

By providing equitable access to land and resources, we are not just supplying food — we are cultivating health, strengthening communities, and nourishing the human spirit.



Fighting Hunger Across Generations

Serving millions of meals to seniors and children

In Philadelphia, the gnawing reality of food insecurity affects hundreds of thousands. With hunger rates soaring to their highest since 2008, Share Food Program, which is supported by Highmark and Highmark Wholecare, stands as a critical lifeline, distributing about 30 million meals in 2024 alone.

As the largest senior food relief program in Pennsylvania, they deliver an average of 4,500+ nutritious food boxes monthly to homebound seniors across Philadelphia, Montgomery, and Chester counties.

Beyond seniors, Share Food Program is the sole nonprofit managing the National School Lunch Program for its region, providing food to 305,000 children across 800 schools and all 70 school districts. They are the leading hunger relief

organization in their area, working with a vast network of community partners, and leveraging resources like the on-site Nice Roots Farm — annually producing more than 5,500 pounds of fresh produce to distribute for free — and the Philly Food Rescue app to minimize food waste.

Executive Director George Matysik shares a powerful anecdote: “A few years ago, a Ukrainian refugee father, tears in his eyes, sought help feeding his five daughters. Stories like this highlight the human face of hunger — a face we encounter daily.”

Share Food Program doesn’t just distribute meals — it cultivates hope. By nourishing bodies and spirits, they are building a healthier, more equitable future for generations to come. Their unwavering dedication ensures that no one in their community faces hunger alone.

Opening the First Door

Creating pathways to prosperity

The quiet desperation of suburban poverty isn’t always visible. Behind neatly manicured lawns and quiet streets, there is a silent crisis. According to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), nearly 41 million Americans live below the poverty line, and a startling majority reside in the suburbs. In Pittsburgh’s southern suburbs, this reality is acutely felt by the families served by the South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM).

For seven years, Highmark Wholecare has partnered with SHIM, witnessing firsthand the growing need.

“Food insecurity is at the heart of our work now,” explains Seth Dubin, SHIM’s director of development and communications. “Even in the suburbs, people struggle to put food on the table. They come to us for help.”

Three food pantries are the beating heart of SHIM, serving 3,900 people monthly — a testament to the hidden hunger crisis. Supported by 250 dedicated volunteers, SHIM serves 8,500 individuals annually through a network of programs encompassing youth initiatives, financial aid, and emergency grants. The face of poverty in the South Hills is diverse. Half of those served by SHIM are refugee and immigrant families.

The food pantry is often the first step. It’s not the final solution, but a crucial entry point to a wider array of resources designed to empower individuals toward self-sufficiency.

SHIM’s mission resonates deeply with us. Beyond financial support, we have sent representatives to their food pantries, engaging directly with the community to promote healthy choices.

SHIM aims to dismantle the shame surrounding seeking assistance. Dubin shared a moving story of a former recipient, now a major benefactor. This woman, once struggling with two young sons amidst divorce and financial hardship, received support from SHIM. Now thriving, she returns this kindness with a generous spirit, embodying the true meaning of “hand up, not handout.”

SHIM’s commitment extends beyond food. Thirteen community gardens provide over 12,000 pounds of fresh produce annually to the food pantries. Over 1,700 South Hills students received school supplies through their Back-to-School program. And as needs evolve, SHIM expands its services, addressing mental health and employment barriers to create more enduring pathways to a brighter future. The first door opened by SHIM leads to a journey of empowerment and hope, a journey of building a thriving, inclusive community, one family at a time.

Social and Community Context

Simple acts — a walk in the park with a friend, a beginner’s yoga class — can profoundly impact one’s well-being. We champion programs fostering social connections, supporting mental and emotional health. This year, we estimate that our supported programs provided mental health or peer support services to nearly 70,000 individuals and physical activities to nearly half a million more, empowering people to flourish through connection and activity.



A Community Tradition, One Mile at a Time

The Parkersburg, West Virginia Half Marathon encourages healthy living and community spirit

The rhythmic pounding of 650 feet on pavement, the cheers of a town united, the vibrant energy of a community tradition — this is the Parkersburg News and Sentinel Half Marathon. More than just a race, it's a powerful illustration of community spirit and the vital importance of heart health. According to the American Heart Association, heart failure cases are projected to surge to 8.5 million Americans by 2030 — so the race's focus on physical activity couldn't be timelier.

For over two decades, we have proudly supported this event, witnessing firsthand its profound impact. We believe in the transformative power of movement and the strengthening bonds

forged through shared experiences. We know that even 10 minutes of running can significantly lower cardiovascular disease risk, and walking offers similar benefits. But the Parkersburg Half Marathon offers something more: a profound sense of community and connection.

This year's race, a scenic journey through West Virginia's picturesque landscape, showcased the deep roots of this community tradition. Art Smith, co-director and a Parkersburg News and Sentinel veteran, beams, "I love seeing the community come together. The mayor starts the race, volunteers pour their time into it, local businesses donate — it's what makes a town a true community."



Steve Browning, the other co-director, embodies the race's enduring spirit. For 36 years, he hasn't missed a single run, a testament to the deep connections he's forged through participation. He's one of only two people to participate every year since the race's inception. "This race is the best of Parkersburg," Browning affirms, "bringing people together in a way you rarely see."

The race's success is the result of the dedication of its volunteers, many returning year after year, building relationships, and strengthening community bonds. Smith proudly recounts awarding medals to participants who have run for over 30 years, becoming honorary members

of the town, demonstrating the lasting impact of shared experiences. Generations now run together, including Smith's own daughters, carrying on the tradition and strengthening family ties.

Browning, a seasoned marathoner, offers advice to aspiring runners: "Start with the run/walk method, attend a running clinic, and gradually increase your distance. It takes about a year to train for a half-marathon, but the challenge is worth it, and the sense of accomplishment and camaraderie you'll gain is even greater."

The Parkersburg Half Marathon isn't just a race; it's a powerful symbol of community, tradition, and wellness.

Sports Meet Health

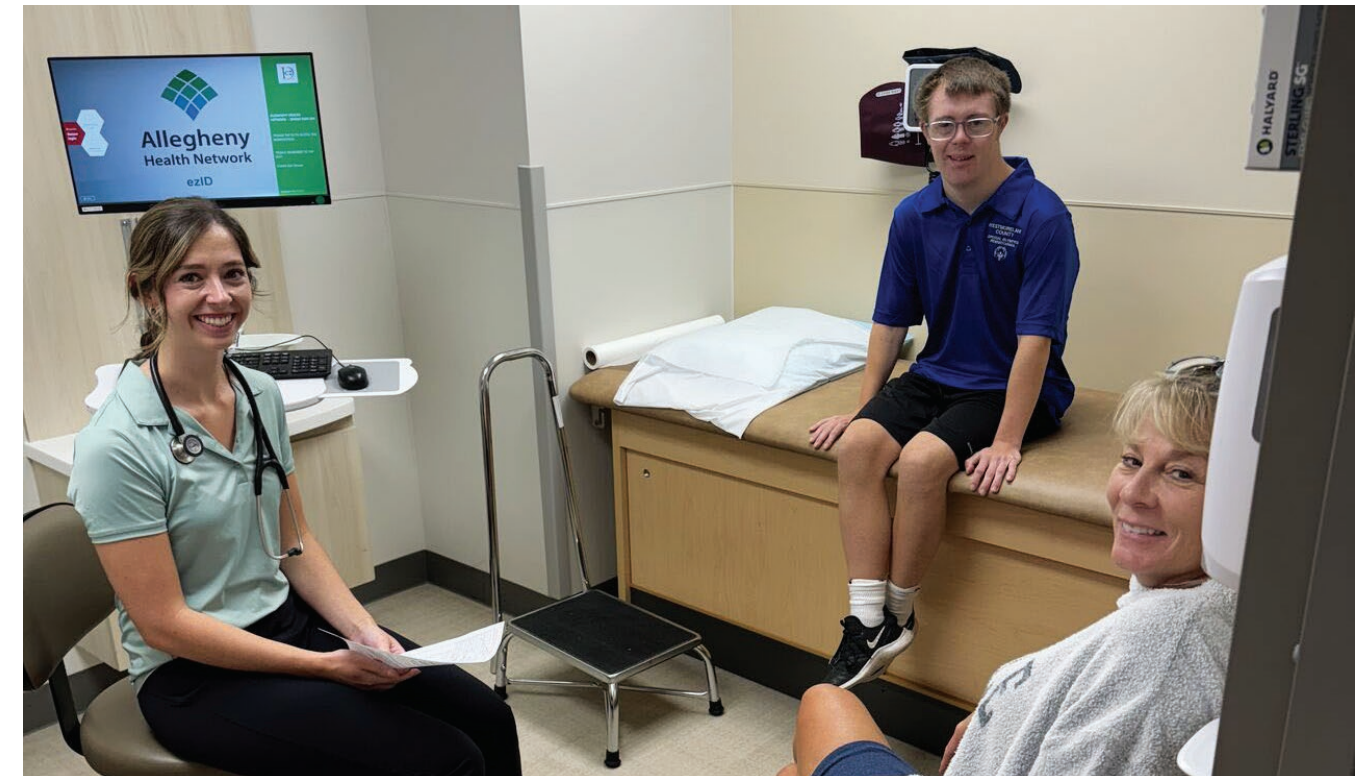
Health screenings and mindfulness programs encourage Special Olympics athletes

Since 1968, the Special Olympics has harnessed the power of sports to transform lives, empowering 5 million athletes across 180 countries. More than just athletic competition, Special Olympics aims to reshape how athletes with intellectual disabilities view themselves and how the world sees them. This transformative work is done completely free of charge to athletes and families, ensuring that financial barriers never stand in the way of participation.

Highmark shares this unwavering commitment to inclusion and has partnered with Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) for over a decade, supporting their mission to provide year-round sports training and competition. SOPA offers athletes the opportunity to develop physical fitness, demonstrate

courage, experience joy, and build lasting friendships. Central to this mission is Unified Sports®, which unites athletes with and without intellectual disabilities, breaking down barriers and fostering genuine connection.

Andrew Fee, SOPA's vice president of strategic partnerships, explains, "Unified Sports is one of our most powerful programs. We're removing labels, just playing sports. It's growing in schools and across the state." This inclusive spirit is amplified by Allegheny Health Network's (AHN) significant contribution, providing free, non-invasive health screenings in eight disciplines — from eye exams to dental checks — at SOPA events. "We're on track to screen our 15,000th athlete in 2025," Fee says, "demonstrating the critical need for these services."



Recognizing that many SOPA athletes face health disparities, AHN's support goes beyond one-day screenings. The focus is on long-term well-being, including crucial mental health support, which is where the innovative Strong Minds program steps in. This mindfulness initiative provides athletes with adaptive coping skills to navigate the challenges and pressures of competition.

The AHN Pop Up Chill Room™, an initiative of AHN Chill Project, is a calming space offering evidenced-based emotional wellness coping skills and relaxation techniques to further support mental wellness. This year, AHN Pop Up Chill Room and two expert behavioral health team members were deployed to SOPA events. Dr. William Davies, director of AHN Chill Project, stated, "We were honored by the opportunity to serve the SOPA community and provide support to participants,

coaches, and families, helping them with the stress of competition, and providing skills to enhance their overall well-being." The impact was profound.

Jordan C. Schubert, a Special Olympics Pennsylvania athlete, powerfully describes its effects, "This past Summer Games was difficult ... we didn't win a single game. But the Chill Room allowed my teammates and I a quiet space ... to forget about our frustration. After spending time there, we left in higher spirits and played better. Even though we lost, we still walked off the court smiling!"

Through our partnership with SOPA and AHN's vital contributions, we help create a supportive environment where athletes not only achieve athletic excellence but also nurture their mental and emotional well-being — a testament to the power of sports to transform lives, both on and off the field.

Unified Sports® is a registered program of Special Olympics, bringing together people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team to foster inclusion, build friendships, and promote social equity through the power of sports. Special Olympics Pennsylvania is proud to partner with Highmark to expand access to Unified Sports®, creating opportunities for individuals of all abilities to compete, grow, and thrive together.

A Prescription for Nature and Mental Wellness

Getting outdoors leads to renewed perspective

In a world increasingly dominated by screens and fast-paced lives, the restorative power of nature offers a vital counterpoint. We recognize this, partnering with ParkRx in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, to unlock nature's profound benefits for mental well-being.

Michelle McKeown, program manager of Dauphin County Parks and Recreation, explains the program's genesis, "Our parks saw a surge in use as people sought solace and connection during the pandemic. We knew the mental health benefits of nature were undeniable. Highmark immediately understood the need, and we launched the ParkRx series in 2021."

ParkRx's goal is to create diverse programs that appeal to all ages and interests, improving cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. Over 100 programs — from sunset sound meditations and forest bathing to West African drumming — offer a wide range of experiences designed to foster a lifelong connection with nature. The program's success is evident in the transformations it inspires. One couple, empowered by an outdoor survival course, went on to pursue backpacking, a testament to ParkRx's ability to build confidence and encourage new adventures.

Scientific evidence supports ParkRx's premise. Studies consistently demonstrate that exposure to nature reduces stress, improves cognitive function, lowers blood pressure, and enhances mood. In our increasingly technology-driven world, connecting people to nature's restorative power is more crucial than ever.

Currently, eight Dauphin County parks offer ParkRx programs, reaching 1,914 participants in 2024 through 112 programs. Most programs are free or subsidized, ensuring accessibility for all. The program's reach extends to rural communities, offering vital opportunities for connection and well-being.

McKeown highlights ParkRx's holistic approach, "We create positive experiences that range in ability level, incorporating physical activities like yoga and hiking alongside mental wellness programs like sound meditation and art therapy." This culturally rich programming also benefits the local economy, with participants continuing their training at local businesses, fostering community growth and awareness.

ParkRx isn't just about accessing nature; it's about nurturing the mind, body, and spirit — a powerful prescription for a healthier, happier life. We are proud to be a part of this vital initiative.



Education Access

We empower individuals and strengthen our workforce by expanding access to education at every level. In 2024 alone, we estimate that we supported more than 60,000 individuals in pursuing education by providing comprehensive support and scholarship funding, as well as providing exposure to training and upskilling programs for in-demand fields like health care and technology.



Enhancing Student Success

Partnering with PASSHE to empower Pennsylvania students

The transformative power of higher education is undeniable. College graduates in the U.S. earn 66% more than their non-graduate peers, significantly reducing their risk of poverty and reliance on social services. We believe this opportunity should be accessible to all.

Since 1999, we've partnered with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) Foundation, sharing their commitment to affordable, high-quality education that empowers students and strengthens Pennsylvania communities. PASSHE serves a significant number of low-income, minority, and first-generation students.

Our long-standing commitments are embodied in our support of PASSHE's scholarship program, which we have supported since 2009. It is designed to cultivate a highly skilled workforce and address our ongoing need for talented professionals.

"Ninety-four percent of Highmark Bright Blue Futures Scholars graduate or continue their education," says Shelley Scherer, PASSHE president and CEO, highlighting the program's profound impact. "Highmark is our largest corporate scholarship provider."

Beyond scholarships, we are partnering with PASSHE on a new initiative to increase access to work-based learning opportunities. Launched in 2024, this three-year pilot program, engaging 1,000 students, integrates real-world experiences and case studies into academic curricula. This innovative collaboration involves our data and analytics team that is developing cutting-edge case studies on AI and technology specifically for Slippery Rock and Shippensburg Universities. Professors in the computer science department at the respective universities were matched with our employees to cocreate the case studies.

"We're very excited about this partnership," said Scherer. "This is a really different approach and there is a great deal of enthusiasm around faculty and business leaders working together. We look forward to scaling this pilot across the State System."

Our collaboration with PASSHE is not just providing scholarships; it's building a more skilled workforce and a more prosperous Pennsylvania.



Neighborhood and Built Environment

Investment in the built environment is fundamental to fostering a sense of belonging and equity within our communities. This encompasses improvements to public spaces, transportation networks, and community facilities, alongside the crucial task of addressing safety and accessibility challenges. We prioritize community engagement and collaboration throughout this process, ensuring that the resulting built environment accurately reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of our communities.



A Bike Ride, a Life Changed

Access to bikes means access to opportunities

A city can feel vast and unreachable without reliable transportation. Essential appointments, job opportunities, and access to healthy food become distant dreams, hampered by infrequent buses and long distances. For many, daily life is a struggle against distance, a barrier to a better future. A solution for some lies in the power of two wheels: a bicycle, offering freedom and independence where once there was only frustration.

We're proud to partner with organizations working to make cycling a realistic and enjoyable transportation option for everyone. We partnered with GoBike Buffalo this year, supporting their Pedal Power program which gets donated bikes ready for community use.

"It takes supplies — new tires, brakes — and labor to get these bikes ready," explains Kevin Heffernan, GoBike Buffalo's communications director.

"One in four households in Buffalo don't have access to a car. To lift our community economically, we need to make it easier and safer to walk or bike."

GoBike Buffalo distributes approximately 350 refurbished bikes annually and hosts workshops, teaching over 1,400 people in 2023 how to maintain their bikes independently.

Heffernan sums it up perfectly, "Everyone should have access to a bike, no matter where they live or their riding confidence level. The joy of cycling and the health benefits are incredible."

Currently boasting 600 bikes and 60 stations spanning 18 neighborhoods, POGO (Bike Share Pittsburgh), of which we are a founding title sponsor, plans to expand significantly in 2025. They will add approximately 50 more stations and 550 bikes. This expansion will further increase accessibility for residents across the city.



“One in four households in Buffalo don't have access to a car. To lift our community economically, we need to make it easier and safer to walk or bike.”

Last year alone, POGO recorded an impressive 360,000 individual bike rentals, with over 80% of trips undertaken by local residents.

"We are really excited about these numbers," says David White, POGO's executive director. "We've seen thousands of new customers, many taking short trips around the area, and an overall dramatic increase in ridership. It's not just tourists; the vast majority are from our local region."

Central to POGO's mission is equity. Their Mobility Justice Program offers 12 months of unlimited 60-minute bike rentals for just \$10 a year to low-income individuals. Membership soared from 197 in 2023 to 550 in 2024, reflecting a growing need and the program's success. Two-thirds of the fleet consists of electric-assist bikes, making cycling accessible to those who may find traditional bikes or Pittsburgh's many hills challenging.

"I met someone recently who said using POGO to get to a job interview was a turning point," White shares. "It's often difficult or expensive to use other transportation methods, but the bike created a path to something wonderful. People are finding new ways to get around and it's making a big difference."

Further enhancing inclusivity, POGO's Adaptive program offers a free fleet of adaptive bikes, including bicycles and tricycles, for individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities.

Through these partnerships, we're not just providing bikes; we're fostering healthier, more connected, and more equitable communities.

SECTION 2

Community and Economic Resilience

We invest in the economic well-being and vitality of our communities of every type and size, recognizing the interconnectedness of health, economic stability, and community resilience.

Our flexible approach tailors partnerships and initiatives to the unique needs of each community, fostering strength and connecting community members to resources. Our commitment not only positions communities for long-term success in an ever-changing world, but also builds stronger relationships and cultivates a thriving, skilled workforce.



A Celebration of Heritage and Hope

A vibrant jazz festival fuels artistic legacy in the Steel City



Pittsburgh's August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC) pulsed with life this year, celebrating its 15th anniversary and its profound impact on the city through the lens of its annual International Jazz Festival, which we co-presented this year. More than just a weekend of music, this festival — themed “Resilience” — became a powerful testament to Pittsburgh's rich cultural heritage and its vibrant future. The festival isn't just about notes and rhythms; it's a vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of community, economic growth, and artistic legacy.

The AWAACC, a stunning structure designed by renowned African American architect Allison Grace Williams, stands as a beacon. It's the second-largest multi-disciplinary African American performing arts center in the nation, a testament to the city's commitment to celebrating Black creativity and innovation. Its 8,000 square feet of gallery space, coupled with a robust schedule of performances, educational programs, and community outreach initiatives, ensures its relevance extends far beyond its walls, even into local schools.

“The Center has a commitment to fostering the next generation of artists and art supporters, echoing August Wilson's legacy — a Pittsburgh native whose 80th birthday was commemorated this year,” said Janis Burley Wilson, president and CEO of the AWAACC. “The center's programming, reflecting Wilson's universal themes of identity, continues to resonate deeply within the community and beyond.”

We co-presented this year's Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival, a free event attracting diverse audiences, showcased both established and emerging artists from around the globe.

Robert Glasper brought his innovative blend of post-bop and hip-hop, while the velvet tones of Maysa and the blues power of Shemekia Copeland captivated audiences. The legendary Average White Band made a poignant stop on their farewell tour, sharing their decades of musical experience. International flavors were added by Cuban hip-hop artist CimaFunk and Brazilian singer Luedji Luna, bringing their unique grooves to the Keystone State. The pulsating energy of these and other

performances on Liberty Avenue showcased the future of jazz, inspiring new generations of listeners and performers.

The festival's economic impact is undeniable: attracting thousands of visitors to the city, filling hotel rooms, and boosting local businesses.

The Jazz Train, a unique initiative spearheaded by pianist Orrin Evans, further amplified the festival's reach. This five-day musical journey from New Jersey to Philadelphia, culminating in Pittsburgh, fosters collaboration and community. This year's journey included a particularly powerful exchange: a student quartet from Philadelphia performed alongside their Pittsburgh counterparts, facilitated by the Music Forward Foundation.

The Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival is a powerful event that reflects the resilience of the human spirit, the vibrancy of Pittsburgh's cultural scene, and the crucial role art plays in driving economic prosperity and fostering a sense of shared identity. It is a unique event, inextricably linked to the city's history, deeply rooted in its present, and vital to its future.



The Joy of Music with Your Morning Coffee

Friendships formed during Coffee Concert series

For 90 years, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra has filled western New York with music. And for decades, we have been proud to support their vibrant community outreach — and most recently, their beloved Coffee Concert series.

Last year, over 15,000 people — many of them seniors — enjoyed the pre-concert treat of coffee, donuts, and the warm camaraderie of shared musical experiences.

Music Director JoAnn Falletta said, “The Coffee Concerts have become the ‘favorite concert time’ for many. Musicians mingle with guests, friends gather, new friendships bloom, and everyone leaves filled with joy.”

The Philharmonic’s history is woven into the fabric of Buffalo. Born as a Works Progress

Administration orchestra, its mission has always been to bring music to the people. Today, nearly 200,000 western New Yorkers experience their music annually, and millions more worldwide enjoy their critically acclaimed recordings — over 50 in the last 25 years, earning multiple Grammy nominations and wins.

“You will have a great experience at one of our concerts,” said Falletta. “They prove that music can enrich lives and strengthen communities in profound ways. It’s a privilege to witness this impact year after year.”

We’re thrilled to continue supporting the Buffalo Philharmonic and to share the transformative power of music for years to come.

Passport to Opportunity

Kids and families unplug, connect, and explore downtown

Visit the farmer’s market and pick out some fresh fruits and vegetables.

Rent a book from the Osterhout Free Library.

Find two petroglyphs in the Public Square and draw a picture of them.

These are just a few examples of the activities included on the Diamond City Partnership’s (DCP) Downtown Discoveries Passport Program and KidsFest event that we sponsor in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. These events are geared toward getting families into the community and connected to local resources.

The DCP is a nonprofit aiming to revitalize downtown Wilkes-Barre by focusing on the economy, environment, and image of the area.

“We want to make this a place where people want to live, work, and visit,” said Shelby Monk, marketing and event coordinator at DCP. “We strive to keep downtown clean, safe, and beautiful. We want to highlight the good things happening in our area and KidsFest is one of those events because it benefits a health initiative. We encourage kids and families to get out into the community, visit new places, and spend a day away from technology.”

KidsFest kicks off the Passport Program.

This free and fun day allows families to come out and enjoy activities together, even if their resources are limited. The event also gives attendees the chance to meet local police and firefighters to become familiar with law enforcement and learn about other helpful community organizations.

“This event is not just about having fun,” said Monk. “It’s a way to offer kids and families free health care items and connect them to needed resources. Highmark is really taking care of the people in their backyard by sponsoring programs like this.”

After the event, kids can start getting their passports stamped, which fosters the opportunity for them and their families to visit new businesses and hopefully return for future visits. Monk says it’s really impacting the local economy and hopes to see the events continue for years to come.

SECTION 3

Highmark Bright Blue Futures Awards and Thought Leadership Forum

The Highmark Bright Blue Futures Awards celebrate exceptional nonprofit organizations moving the needle on health equity across Pennsylvania, Delaware, western and northeastern New York, and West Virginia. This awards program, made possible by the Highmark Foundation, recognizes those working to ensure everyone has a fair and just opportunity to achieve their best health — a vision aligned with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s definition of health equity.

The awards are not merely accolades; they represent our commitment to a future where health is accessible and equitable for all. By celebrating these outstanding organizations, we aim to inspire further action, collaboration, and innovation in the pursuit of healthier communities.

In addition to celebrating our awardees, this year we brought together nearly 100 past and current award winners and community leaders for a Thought Leadership Forum, creating a dynamic space for connection, knowledge sharing, and the forging of new partnerships dedicated to advancing health equity.



Highmark Bright Blue Futures Signature Award Winners

The following profiles highlight the five Signature Awardees

Westside Family Healthcare

KENT AND NEW CASTLE COUNTIES, DELAWARE

Westside Family Healthcare is tackling health equity head-on, focusing on the communities that need it most.

- Westside Family Healthcare is **Delaware's largest** nonhospital primary care provider.
- They serve over **27,000 patients** each year, with multilingual staff.
- They provide care for migrant and seasonal agricultural workers through a **mobile health outreach team**.
- In 2022, nearly **100 health care workers** were trained to become the next community-based health care workforce.

Center for Population Health

JOHNSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Center for Population Health has a vision to empower the community where all people have access to equitable health opportunities in their service area.

- The Community Care HUB is a one-stop shop aimed at **improving health outcomes**.
- Community health workers serve on the front lines to **increase health and knowledge**.
- Community health workers also **increase access to food and housing**.
- Over **2,200 referrals** led to over **10,000 contacts** made with participants.
- Over **5,000 pathways** were opened to address various social determinants of health needs.
- **Improvements** have been seen in preterm births and low birthweight rates.

Buffalo Urban League

BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Buffalo Urban League is working to ensure that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible as they empower African Americans, other minorities, and disadvantaged individuals.

- The Buffalo Urban League serves over **100,000 community members**.
- The organization has a strong reputation in **tackling social determinants of health**.
- They address **systemic barriers** and advocate to **improve the health of African Americans and vulnerable urban community members**.
- They provide vital mental health support to over **11,000 individuals**.
- They train community health workers to **bridge the gap** between health care providers and underserved communities.

Maternity Care Coalition

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Maternity Care Coalition (MCC) has been dedicated to improving maternal and child health and early care and education throughout Pennsylvania and Delaware for over four decades.

- The Maternity Care Coalition served over **5,000 families** in the past year.
- It **breaks down health equity** barriers with wraparound services. Services include:
 - Case management.
 - Early education services.
 - Doula and lactation support.
 - Family therapy.
 - Workforce development.
- The Maternity Care Coalition **addresses specific challenges** faced by pregnant and parenting families affected by incarceration, substance use, and mental health challenges.

Mid-Atlantic Mothers' Milk Bank

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Mid-Atlantic Mothers' Milk Bank fulfills the need for a reliable supply of safe and ethically sourced donor milk for medically fragile infants. They are committed to overcoming economic, social, and other obstacles to health and health care for the families they serve.

- The Mid-Atlantic Mothers' Milk Bank **provides milk** from carefully screened volunteer donors that is bottle tested and pasteurized.
- Within **six months of opening**, all NICUs in western Pennsylvania were using donor milk.
- Babies are having **fewer complications, shorter hospital stays, and are thriving**.
- Donor milk use in hospitals is leading to a **higher rate of exclusive maternal breastfeeding success**.

Highmark Bright Blue Futures Rising Star Awardees

The spotlight shone brightly on the Rising Star awardees — a constellation of organizations dedicated to improving lives across the northeast. In the realm of nourishment and opportunity, South End Children’s Cafe in Albany, New York, and Penn State Health in central Pennsylvania were celebrated for their tireless efforts to educate communities about nutrition, bolster food security, and ensure everyone has access to healthy meals.

Then came the heroes championing mothers, babies, and families. Penn Medicine Lancaster General Hospital Foundation in eastern Pennsylvania worked tirelessly to guarantee that every mother and child received the best possible medical care. Across the region, Catholic Charities in Delaware battled health disparities, striving to reduce infant mortality rates. In Pittsburgh, the Latino Community Center’s community health workers formed a vital network of support for new parents, guiding them through the challenges of raising healthy and happy babies. Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania CASA Association worked to

strengthen the safety net for vulnerable children, improving access to advocacy, mental health services, and overall well-being within the child welfare system.

Finally, the awards recognized organizations dedicated to ensuring quality of and access to health care. The Hudson Headwaters Health Network in Albany, New York, was lauded for its commitment to improving patient outcomes through better quality measures. The Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health tackled the critical issue of access to dental care for children. In western New York, the Roswell Park Alliance Foundation brought lifesaving lung cancer screenings to those who needed them most. And in West Virginia, the West Virginia Health Right worked tirelessly to address the social determinants of health, promoting health equity for all.

Each Rising Star, in its own unique way, illuminated the path toward a healthier, more equitable future.



SECTION 4

Community Health and Employee Engagement Programs

Our commitment extends far beyond financial contributions. We believe in a deeply engaged, hands-on approach to community betterment, fostering genuine partnerships with the people and organizations we support. Our employees are active participants, investing not only their professional expertise and time, but also their personal resources to make a tangible difference.



Piecing It All Together

Nonprofits, walkers, and quilters unite



Since its inception, the Highmark Walk For A Healthy Community has raised over \$19.2 million, benefiting more than 560 health and human service nonprofits. Imagine the impact: thousands of individuals stepping out for a cause, their collective efforts translating into vital resources for organizations working tirelessly to improve lives.

In 2024 alone, six vibrant communities — Erie, Harrisburg, Laurel Highlands, Lehigh Valley, Pittsburgh, and Wilmington, Delaware — came together, with 5,504 participants lacing up their shoes and walking for a healthier future. What sets this walk apart? One hundred percent of the funds

raised go directly to the participating organizations; we cover all event costs. This ensures every dollar donated has maximum impact.

The story doesn't end with the fundraising. This year, a remarkable element emerged: a heartfelt expression of gratitude woven into fabric. Our employees and guests dedicated over 300 volunteer hours crafting beautiful handmade quilts, presented to the top fundraising organizations in each region. This gesture, as moving as the fundraising itself, speaks volumes about the deep connection we have with the communities we serve.

Lisa Boyd, an employee and a quilter, captured the sentiment perfectly: “Knowing these quilts will hang in these organizations for years to come fills me with pride.” The experience even inspired non-quilters to step outside their comfort zones, creating a collaborative spirit as joyful as it was productive.

The winning organizations — a diverse group of heroes tackling critical issues — represent the true heart of this initiative. From Paxton Ministries providing affordable housing, to Camp Harmony offering vital community support, and

organizations like St. Martin's Center, LifePath, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, and Friendship House addressing homelessness and hunger, these are the organizations making a real difference.

The Highmark Walk For A Healthy Community isn't just about raising money — it's about building bridges, fostering community spirit, and celebrating the power of collective action to create a healthier and more vibrant world.



Highmark Bright Blue Futures Goes Pink

Employees rally for breast cancer awareness, support, and early detection

One in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, and early detection and treatment significantly improve survival rates. Men can get breast cancer, too, accounting for 1% of all cases.

This October, Highmark Bright Blue Futures painted its footprint pink in a powerful display of support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. More than 400 employees across New York, Delaware, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania rallied together to raise awareness and make a tangible difference in the lives of those affected by breast cancer.

Partnering with leading providers and cancer charities, employees participated in a series of impactful volunteer events: making care packages for breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, putting together comfort quilts,

and writing notes of encouragement to breast cancer survivors and thrivers.

The impact extended beyond these tangible acts of kindness. On-site mammogram scheduling and easily accessible breast self-exam reminders empowered employees to prioritize their own health, a crucial first step in early detection.

We also recognize that understanding diverse experiences is critical to effective advocacy. By involving our Business Resource Groups (BRGs), representing a wide range of backgrounds, we ensured a holistic approach, focusing not only on awareness, but also on addressing disparities in screening and access to care.

The collective energy and compassion demonstrated this October prove that, together, we can make a significant impact.



Removing Challenges, Expanding Access

United Way of the Capital Region's Contact to Care Program empowers independence

For years, we have partnered with the United Way of the Capital Region (Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry counties) to empower independence through health care access.

Specifically, our investment in their Contact to Care program — launched in 2017 — has already made a profound difference. Nearly 3,900 individuals have received referrals to support programs or vouchers for essential vision and dental care.

This success stems from a targeted, community-focused approach. The program actively reaches out to individuals facing barriers to health care, including language, transportation, and socioeconomic challenges. At the heart of this effort are nine community health workers — intentionally recruited to reflect the diverse backgrounds of the communities they serve, with a priority given to bilingual (primarily Spanish-speaking) candidates.

To further enhance outreach, 12 health navigation videos have been created in English, Spanish, Nepali, and Arabic. These will reinforce the crucial messages delivered by the community health workers, building upon the existing use of CyraCom language services at free health care clinics. A new video featuring a program participant's journey, highlighting the crucial role of overcoming language barriers, has also been produced.

The program has a comprehensive approach, tackling transportation issues, health care access, and language barriers. With plans to expand into local school districts, the program will soon provide even more families with critical support, addressing needs ranging from annual checkups and dental screenings to food insecurity and transportation.

We are dedicated to strengthening these vital community partnerships and enhancing communication to ensure equitable access to resources for everyone.

Creating Kits for Comfort

Supporting shelters, inspiring hope

Our marketing team transformed their annual meeting into a powerful community service project. Inspired to make a real difference, they teamed up with Clean the World to assemble 1,000 hygiene kits packed with essential supplies, warm socks, and handwritten messages of hope.

These kits brought much-needed comfort to five local shelters, including Latrobe Street Mission in Parkersburg, West Virginia; Buffalo City Mission

in Buffalo, New York; Downtown Daily Bread in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania; Light of Life Rescue Mission in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Sunday Breakfast Mission in Wilmington, Delaware. Each received 200 kits.

The experience fostered stronger team connections while directly addressing a critical need in the community, proving that even a simple act of kindness can have a powerful impact.



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