



Your thinking, our future.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Minnesota Idea Open Invites Everyday Visionaries
to Help Chart the Future**

The Inaugural Challenge is Obesity; Idea Submitting Begins Today

SAINT PAUL, MINN., March 18, 2010 – Implicit in every news story about problems in Minnesota is the need for someone to address them. Enter the Minnesota Idea Open, an innovative new way to bring together all citizens to solve critical issues facing the state.

Starting today, Minnesotans can go online at www.MNIdeaOpen.org to suggest ideas for how to address important issues. The first major statewide challenge focuses on the issue of obesity. All Minnesotans can submit ideas for how their communities could use \$15,000 to help people eat smart and be active.

Judges will narrow the ideas to a few finalists and every Minnesotan will be invited to vote for the idea they think is the best. The winning idea will become a reality.

“The Minnesota Idea Open uses the power of technology to engage the entire state in figuring out how to make progress on tough issues,” said Carleen Rhodes, CEO of Minnesota Community Foundation. “We are very excited to see what new ideas people suggest that we can help make happen.”

Visitors to the Web site also can join group discussions with other Minnesotans and issue experts, as well as find resources to learn more about the issue.

The Minnesota Idea Open is a project of Minnesota Community Foundation with major funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The obesity challenge is sponsored by a number of organizations including Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, HealthEast Care System, HealthPartners and UCare, and uses technology from Ashoka’s Changemakers (www.changemakers.com).

“We’re thrilled to be partnering with the Minnesota Community Foundation to engage citizens and their communities around issues of public importance,” said Charlie Brown, executive director of

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Ashoka's Changemakers. "This is just the first in an ongoing series of challenges that will engage Minnesotans to collectively define the future of their state."

Challenge I: Ideas for Addressing Obesity

Obesity is a complex problem because it often increases risk for serious health problems such as high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer, and contributes to rising health care costs. According to a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota report, if trends continue, in just 10 years the average cost to treat an obese person will cost 61 percent more than treating a healthy weight person. Currently total obesity-related health care spending in Minnesota is estimated at more than \$1.3 billion annually. If left unchecked, this could increase to more than \$5 billion annually by 2020.

"The obesity trends are alarming," said Sean Kershaw, executive director of the Citizens League, an Idea Open partner. "We are clearly not creating the right incentives and opportunities to help people lead healthy lifestyles. The Minnesota Idea Open will help us find new ideas and generate new energy for addressing this critical issue."

Idea submissions will be accepted through Friday, April 9. The three finalists will be announced on Tuesday, May 4. Voting on the finalists will kick off with a special event at the Minnesota Twins game on Thursday, May 6. The Challenge Champion will be announced the week of May 17.

Minnesotans can find more information and resources about Challenge I at www.MNIdeaOpen.org.

About Minnesota Idea Open

Minnesota Idea Open is an interactive, cutting-edge utility that facilitates community problem-solving around critical issues facing Minnesota. Minnesota Community Foundation launched the Idea Open in 2010 with major funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and partnered with Ashoka Changemakers to create the Idea Open Web site. The Idea Open can host multiple challenges simultaneously and will make the platform available to other organizations that want to use the technology to engage their stakeholders on issues of importance. For more information, visit www.MNIdeaOpen.org.

To contact our sponsors and other key partners, please see the supplemental page.

How to Contact Our Partners

We invite the media to contact our Challenge I sponsors and Idea Open partners:

Citizens League

The nation's premier citizen-based "good government" organization that builds common ground for the common good.

Sean Kershaw, Executive Director
651-324-0991 (c); skershaw@citizensleague.org

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

As the largest, nonprofit health plan based in Minnesota, Blue Cross is committed to improving the health of our 2.8 million members – and all Minnesotans – by tackling the leading causes of preventable death and disease: tobacco and obesity.

Karen Lyons, Public Relations Consultant
651-662-1415 (o); 612-408-0770 (c); Karen_M_Lyons@bluecrossmn.com

HealthEast

The largest health care organization in the Twin Cities East Metro.

Jodi Ritacca, Senior Public Relations Specialist
651-232-6410 (o); 651-864-3547 (pager)

HealthPartners

The largest consumer-governed, nonprofit health care organization in the nation, providing care, coverage, research and education to improve the health of members, patients and the community.

Sarah Haverkamp, Corporate Communications
952-883-5305 (o); Sarah.J.Haverkamp@HealthPartners.com

UCare

UCare is an independent, nonprofit health plan serving 200,000 Minnesota Health Care Program and Medicare members across Minnesota and in western Wisconsin.

Wendy Wicks, Communications Manager
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Ashoka's Changemakers

Specializes in online competitions for social change.

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