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**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Report: Majority of Minnesotans overweight or obese *Face Barriers to Eating Better, Moving More***

### **Community, clinical settings can help encourage healthy changes**

**EAGAN, Minn. (May 7, 2010)** – A new report released today by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) reveals new insights about Minnesota’s obesity problem among adults and obesity’s two preventable causes: physical inactivity and unhealthy eating. The report, “Physical Activity and Healthy Eating in Minnesota: Addressing Root Causes of Obesity,” concludes that Minnesotans know they need to lose weight and many are trying, but individual attitudes and their surroundings are barriers to their success. The report offers hope, that by intervening in a variety of ways and in multiple settings – where people live, work and play – it will be easier for people to make the healthy choice and lose weight or maintain a healthy weight.

The new report found that more than 60 percent of Minnesota adults are overweight or obese. This puts the majority of adults in Minnesota – about 2.2 million people – at increased risk for high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis and colon cancer. Treating obesity-related disease and illness takes a tremendous toll on our quality of life and our pocketbooks. According to a recent national report, medical costs for obese individuals are 42 percent higher than medical costs for normal weight individuals – an annual difference of \$1,429. In Minnesota, today’s total annual obesity-related health care costs are estimated at more than \$1.3 billion according to a 2004 study. And Blue Cross found this amount could increase to more than \$5 billion annually by 2020 if left unchecked.

“Weight is killing us. It’s making people sick and it’s costing us all,” said Dr. Marc Manley, Chief Prevention Officer at Blue Cross. “We can stop this epidemic and help Minnesotans manage their current weight and prevent future weight gain by approaching it from all angles – working with individuals, businesses and communities – to encourage moving more and eating better. It’s clear the healthy choice must be the easy choice in our state.”

#### **Key report findings include:**

- ***A majority of overweight and obese Minnesotans are trying to lose weight.*** Nearly 70 percent of obese adults and 53 percent of overweight adults are trying to lose weight, yet still one-third (31 percent) of all adults fail to meet federal recommendations for physical activity.

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Of those Minnesotans who don't meet recommended physical activity guidelines, 57 percent say they want to add more walking – the easiest and most accessible form of activity – to their lifestyle.

- ***Most Minnesotans don't eat enough fruits and vegetables.*** Only 15 percent of adults eat their recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables, compared to 58 percent who report eating pastries or other sweets on a daily basis. Nearly all adults (99 percent) agree that fruits and vegetables make an important difference to health, but only one in four (24 percent) know the daily recommended amount.
- ***Minnesota workplaces can help employees move more and eat better.*** Two-thirds (66 percent) of adult Minnesotans are employed in sedentary jobs, yet fewer than half of all workers have places to be active at work or employers that encourage or provide incentives to be physically active. Additionally, less than one in four have access to low or reasonably priced fruits and vegetables via on-site food service (24 percent) or at all through vending machines (11 percent).
- ***Most Minnesotans want their communities designed to help people be more active.*** Nearly all adults (90 percent) believe that how a community is built has a big effect on how much physical activity individuals get, yet less than one third live in neighborhoods or communities with features that encourage physical activity. In addition, 93 percent believe future transportation projects should consider walkers and bicyclers as well as motor vehicles and 72 percent agree laws should require communities to build sidewalks and bike paths.
- ***Minnesota health care providers have a unique opportunity to actively support and provide weight loss/management resources to patients.*** About 70 percent of obese or overweight adults report their doctors *asked* about physical activity levels, and a smaller percent (38 percent of overweight and 56 percent of obese) were *asked* about their diet. Even less were *advised* to get more physical activity or eat more fruits and vegetables, and only 5 to 20 percent were *assisted* with a personal plan or received a recommendation or referral to a physical activity program or gym, a dietician or other class, group or website for help. Furthermore fewer than half of all adult Minnesotans have ever calculated or been told their BMI (body mass index) even though clinical guidelines from the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI) recommend health care providers calculate the BMI of all patients.

An additional poll Blue Cross conducted in December, found that parents felt obesity was more of a problem among Minnesota's children than it was 10 years ago, with fast food, sugar-sweetened beverages, candy or junk food, and the elimination of mandatory physical education in school as the leading contributing factors. The same poll also showed Minnesotans ranked Blue Cross as a highly credible source of information on obesity, with only doctors and dietitians ranked higher.

As a health company, Blue Cross has launched a number of creative initiatives to combat obesity, including:

- Creating the ***do*** campaign to encourage people to eat better and move more by grooving their bodies

- Sponsoring Nice Ride Minnesota, a public bicycle-sharing program coming to Minneapolis this summer to make it easier for Minnesotans to be active in their daily lives
- Funding community projects to improve access to healthy foods in schools and underserved communities
- Supporting new laws such as Complete Streets, to make communities more walkable and bikeable
- Providing services on [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com) that can help members achieve a healthy weight such as: free online health risk assessments, coaching modules, a BMI calculator, healthy eating plans, discounts on Weight Watchers, biking incentives such as “do-cycle,” a “Walking Works” walking program for employers, and more.

As the state’s lead public health agency, MDH educates the public about the importance of physical activity and nutrition and helps build capacity for local public health to address these issues.

The department’s Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) is helping all 87 counties and eight tribal governments tackle obesity and tobacco use, the two leading causes of preventable death in Minnesota. These communities are working to prevent obesity by increasing opportunities for physical activity and better nutrition in communities, schools, work places and health care organizations. It builds on the Minnesota Plan to Reduce Obesity and Obesity-Related Chronic Diseases, which offers solid, evidence-based solutions for the state, counties and communities to stem the epidemic of obesity.

A copy of the executive summary is available at [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com) and the full report is available upon request.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, with headquarters in the St. Paul suburb of Eagan, was chartered in 1933 as Minnesota’s first health plan and continues to carry out its charter mission today: to promote a wider, more economical and timely availability of health services for the people of Minnesota. A nonprofit, taxable organization, Blue Cross is the largest health plan based in Minnesota, covering 2.7 million members in Minnesota and nationally through its health plans or plans administered by its affiliated companies. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, headquartered in Chicago. Go to [bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com) to learn more about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Each Blue Cross and Blue Shield plan is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.