

## UAB Grand Challenge Proposal

**Grand Challenge Name:** Alabama Healthy State Initiative

**Grand Challenge:** To establish Alabama as the healthiest state in the nation and an international example and model for overall wellbeing, health promotion and commitment to exceptional quality of life for citizens statewide.

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By definition, the word “grand” is described as highly ambitious, idealistic, dignified and noble. This Grand Challenge encompasses the entirety of the word, with an objective to successfully overcome the obesity epidemic, food insecurity and lack of safe/accessible places for physical activity throughout the state of Alabama, all of which are epidemics that have a negative impact worldwide. This proposal incorporates a preventive approach across economically diverse communities that engages schools, health care providers, employees, citizens and businesses with a unified vision. Accomplishing this initiative would holistically address the physical and mental wellbeing of Alabama’s citizens, including both youth and adults.

Average annual growth in health care expenses for the state of Alabama is 5.5 %, which includes spending for all privately and publicly funded personal health care services and products. On a national scale, total U.S. health care spending in 2013 was 2.9 trillion dollars. This is equal to 17.4 % of GDP and was projected to rise to 19.3 % in 2023.

Alabama ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in obesity, 44<sup>th</sup> in physical activity, 42<sup>nd</sup> in smoking, 49<sup>th</sup> in cardiovascular death, 43<sup>rd</sup> in cancer deaths, 49<sup>th</sup> in diabetes and 47<sup>th</sup> in frequent mental distress. This Grand Challenge will include the development of a model of success that begins with initial efforts focused on the largest city in the state, the largest employer of the state and elementary aged children. Additional phases of the grand challenge may include an extension to college and university campuses within a 30 mile radius of the top ten largest cities of the state.

Establishing a successful culture of wellbeing for our city and state begins with collaboration from established infrastructures currently impacting Alabamians. Piloting phase one of the Grand Challenge with strategic focal points will support sustainability of its impact and the ability to track results that identify progress and areas of needed change for three specific audiences: The University of Alabama at Birmingham, City of Birmingham employees and elementary school employees and students participating in HEAL curriculum.

This age inclusive intervention will essentially penetrate a significant portion of our city and state, allowing room for expansion and growth to cities throughout Alabama. Employees of UAB and City of Birmingham commute to work from homes reaching beyond the greater Birmingham territory and these employees are caregivers and family members of children served in schools from those areas. HEAL serves 73 schools, representing seven school systems in the greater Birmingham territory alone, with approximately 14,686 students. With a population currently estimated at 212,237 and a metro population of 1,136,650, the city of Birmingham represents

31% of Alabama's total payroll dollars, ranks 48th in population among the nation's top 366 metropolitan areas and 13th among the largest southeastern metropolitan areas.

UAB School of Medicine serves as an annual outside evaluator of HEAL data and reported evaluations indicating that 75% of all children in the HEAL program have improved fitness scores, 57% of children in the overweight and obese category reduced body mass index, and every child reported improvement in eating behaviors after six months of HEAL training. Collectively, these observations suggest that the HEAL program has achieved significant beneficial results for several consecutive years. These results are consistent with the previous years' results and reveal the sustainability of HEAL, which serves all schools without discrimination, but with a priority placed on reaching the areas with the highest prevalence for obesity and poor health behaviors causing children to be at-risk for developing preventable diseases.

While the specific percentage/ranking for obesity and overweightness changes annually, Alabama children and adults remain near the top. Children across Alabama are at high risk for not reaching their academic potential due to distractions caused by unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, including inadequate nutrition and lack of quality physical activity. Addressing these risk factors through Grand Challenge funding will empower Alabamians to reach higher academic potential, live healthier lives and positively contribute to a thriving society overall.

Measurable outcomes for our Grand Challenge include focus related to three areas state wide: increased access to safe areas to engage in physical activity, increased access to nutrient dense foods and curriculum for early childhood intervention/education. This will include promoting farm stands and "mobile farm stands" that use refurbished buses to deliver low cost fruits and vegetables to food desert areas. Increased accessibility to safe and low/no cost areas that support physical activity will include development/refurbishing sidewalks, community centers, outdoor parks, etc. In addition, intentional efforts will be made to engage more of Alabama's political figures towards these efforts through events such as the Alabama Mayor's walking challenge founded by the Alabama Obesity Task Force.

To support awareness and recognition of healthy eatery establishment, certification criteria will be developed and awarded to restaurants who meet identified guidelines. Special emphasis will be given to eateries in rural communities and food deserts. Additional award criteria will be developed to acknowledge healthy communities with populations under 40,000 who are striving to live well within limited resources. Emphasis will be placed on the purchase of locally grown items (to support economic growth, when feasible), access to safe areas to engage in physical activity, availability of farmers markets (when seasonally possible) and incorporation of HEAL curriculum into schools not currently using the program.

Combining efforts from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and City of Birmingham (representing 27,000+ employees) and HEAL (representing 130 total Alabama schools), this challenge can be confidently accepted and successfully executed, establishing Alabama as a national and international model for healthy living.

## Grand Challenge Partners

### 1. The University of Alabama at Birmingham

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is an internationally renowned research university and academic medical center and the state's largest employer. UAB students, faculty and staff represent over 100 countries with more than 23,000 employees. UAB supports one of every 31 jobs statewide and has an economic impact of more than \$7.15 billion on Alabama.

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### 2. The City of Birmingham

The City of Birmingham employs approximately 4,000 citizens and is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest employer in the metro area. Employee roles include a significantly diverse demographic and include public transit, parks and recreation facilities, police, firemen, etc..

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### 3. HEAL

HEAL is an Alabama born nonprofit organization that is measurably improving children's health through nutrition, physical education, and core health curriculum. The program is

implemented in grades 2<sup>nd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> in over 130 schools across Alabama, including service for over 26,000 children and families. HEAL is credited by the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Alabama State Department of Education for helping schools satisfy 7 out of 10 federal wellness components of the CDC's Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Model, including health education, physical education and physical activity, nutrition environment and services, and health services.

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**Additional UAB entities to consider**

- Center for Exercise Medicine
- Center for Outcomes and Effectiveness Research Education
- Comprehensive Cardiovascular Center
- Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center
- UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center
- UAB Comprehensive Diabetes Center
- UAB Nutrition Obesity Research Center
- Allied Health
- Biostatistics
- Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering
- Communication Studies
- Employee Wellness
- Environmental Health Studies
- Family and Community Medicine
- Genetics
- Health Behavior
- Health Care Organization and Policy
- Health Services Administration
- UAB Medicine
- UAB School of Medicine
- Nutrition Sciences
- Pediatrics
- Oncology
- School of Public Health
- Sociology
- UAB Media Affairs
- Blazer Kitchen

### **Additional Community Partners to Consider**

- Birmingham Superintendent of Schools
- Birmingham School Board
- School Principals
- Teachers
- Local Businesses and Business Organizations:
- Birmingham Business Alliance
- Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Grocery Stores
- Restaurants
- Public Libraries
- YMCA
- Pepper Place Farmer's Market and other local farmer's markets
- Jones Valley Farm