



Media Release



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Reinvestment Fund and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Name Missoula One of 50 *Invest Health* Cities

Missoula to join innovative, national program to improve health in low-income neighborhoods

The City of Missoula has been selected by the Reinvestment Fund and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to take part in the new *Invest Health* initiative. *Invest Health* is aimed at transforming how leaders from mid-size American cities work together to help low-income communities thrive, with specific attention to community features that drive health such as access to safe and affordable housing, places to play and exercise and quality jobs.

Missoula was selected from more than 180 teams from 170 communities that applied to the initiative. Cities with populations between 50,000 and 400,000 were asked to form five-member teams that include representatives from the public sector, community development, and an anchor institution, preferably academic or health-related. Missoula team's team is made up of representatives from Missoula City-County Health Dept., City of Missoula Development Services, NeighborWorks Montana, Providence St. Patrick Hospital and United Way of Missoula County. Our local team will work to improve the affordability and accessibility of healthy homes and healthy behaviors through changes to the built environment, including individual homes (indoor air quality and weatherization), transportation, trails and parks. The team will focus on improvements that will positively affect health outcomes related to asthma, obesity, and mental health.

"It is an honor and an opportunity to draw the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation," said health department director Ellen Leahy. "Already, simply by creating Missoula's *Invest Health* team, we are seeing new ways to work the link between community development and health that can improve public health at the neighborhood level."

Mid-size American cities face some of the nation's deepest challenges with entrenched poverty, poor health and a lack of investment. But they also offer fertile ground for strategies that improve health and have the potential to boost local economies. The program has the potential to fundamentally transform the way Missoula improves opportunities to live healthy lives by addressing the drivers of health, including jobs, housing, education, community safety and environmental conditions.

"With a long history in community development finance, we are excited to help create a pipeline to channel capital into low-income communities through public and private investments," said Amanda High, Chief of Strategic Initiatives at Reinvestment Fund. "Our goal is to transform how cities approach tough challenges, share lessons learned and spur creative collaboration."

Throughout the next 18 months, *Invest Health* teams will take part in a vibrant learning community and have access to highly skilled faculty advisors and coaches who will guide their efforts toward improved health in their communities. Each will receive a \$60,000 grant. Missoula County will also engage a broader group of local stakeholders to encourage local knowledge sharing. Learning from the program will be synthesized and disseminated through the [project website](#). In addition to www.investhealth.org, the project will also have a website presence on the City of Missoula's website with links to Missoula County.

“Public officials, community developers, and many others have been working in low-income neighborhoods for years, but they haven't always worked together,” said Donald Schwarz, MD, MPH, MBA, RWJF Vice President, Program. “*Invest Health* aims to align their work and help neighborhoods thrive by intentionally incorporating health into community development.”

Missoula's projects will explore a broad range of ideas from leveraging capital to improve housing and health outcomes in our low-income neighborhoods to collaborating with stakeholders already doing this work in our community. Examples include developing housing for all, assessing individual homes for air quality and weatherization, creating bike able and walkable neighborhoods with lighting and engaging neighborhood residents throughout the process.

“The relationship between where we live and how we live in Missoula is key to enhancing quality of life for all Missoulians,” said Laval Means, City of Missoula planning services manager. “This was an important element of the recently adopted City Growth Policy, as the document addresses health components directly related to the built environment. With support from the Invest Health Initiative, we can go a step further by planning to create a broad collaboration of community partners to lift people out of poverty through improved housing, health and education.”

Project teams will travel to Philadelphia for a kick-off meeting on June 7 and will meet regularly to share lessons learned throughout the 18-month project. A full list of awardees and more information is available at www.investhealth.org.

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About The Reinvestment Fund

Reinvestment Fund is a catalyst for change in low-income communities. We integrate data, policy and strategic investments to improve the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods. Using analytical and financial tools, we bring high-quality grocery stores, affordable housing, schools and health centers to the communities that need better access—creating anchors that attract investment over the long term and help families lead healthier, more productive lives. Learn more at reinvestment.com.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are striving to build a national Culture of Health that will enable all to live longer, healthier lives now and for generations to come. For more information, visit

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