

# The DO

## HEALTH ED

# DO's wellness project brings health education to Flint, Michigan

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By **THE DO STAFF**

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As the [water crisis](#) in Flint, Michigan, has eased, finding ways to improve the health of the city's residents has become a greater concern. This is what brought family physician Paul Ehrmann, DO, and a group of volunteers to the struggling city last month to introduce the HealthyTown Everywhere initiative to Flint's residents.

[HealthyTown Everywhere](#) is a community-based health and wellness initiative founded in 2014 by Dr. Ehrmann. It centers on educating individuals, families and communities on how to improve their diet and physical activity and develop strategies to live an overall more healthful lifestyle. Health care professionals typically provide the education.

"The three cornerstones of good health start with improved nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle behavior," says Dr. Ehrmann, who has been a physician for nearly 40 years. "Nutrition is a great place to start. If we can teach people how to eat right, that really puts them in a very good position to stay healthy and encourages them to move on to other healthy activities."

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The program was initially piloted with success in Royal Oak, Michigan, and expanded its outreach efforts at the Aug. 18 event in Flint, where students, physicians and registered dietitians from five different universities and health systems volunteered their time.

### Healing a hometown

Nicole LeClair, a Flint native and a fourth-year medical student at Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine (MSUCOM), sees events like HealthyTown Everywhere as a way to give back to her community. She plans to remain in the area to practice medicine.

“I was born and raised in Flint,” LeClair says. “There are not enough doctors here, so I decided to stay to help the people in my community.”

The HealthyTown Everywhere event included a fun walk with the help of [walkwithadoc.org](http://walkwithadoc.org), grocery store tours run by registered and student dietitians, and a health fair that offered screenings for blood sugar, blood pressure, and body mass index. The event also included consultations with physicians and registered dietitians and a [mini medical school](#).

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### Access to healthy food is key

The Flint event was made possible through a partnership with local grocer Hamady Brothers and coincided with the recent grand opening of [Hamady Complete Food Store](#), a former local grocery chain that closed its last store in 1991. Dr. Ehrmann says the store's opening is a significant step in [improving access](#) to fresh fruit, vegetables and other whole foods in the northwest Flint area, where limited availability of nutritious and affordable food options has contributed to high rates of obesity, often leading to an increased incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Dr. Ehrmann's goal for HealthyTown Everywhere is for physicians—those in training and in practice—to partner with allied health professionals to replicate, execute, and sustain a healthy living program in their own practice communities.

“In each community where we have introduced HealthyTown Everywhere, I like to think of our undertaking as a catalyst to getting residents to think about eating right, moving more and living well,” he said.

### Plans to expand

Plans for HealthyTown Everywhere are to continue expanding the initiative throughout Michigan by identifying “champions” to lead the program within their own communities. That includes working with local stakeholders to build models and tailoring the program to suit their community's needs.

Learn more about HealthyTown Everywhere [here](#).

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