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Blue Cross expands “Open Streets” events to seven Minnesota communities in 2012

Events promote walking, bicycling for better health while supporting local businesses

[Eagan, Minn. May 24, 2012] – Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) announced today that it will help seven communities sponsor “Open Streets” events across Minnesota to encourage people of *all ages and abilities* to get out and enjoy their community by foot, bike, skateboard, wheelchair or even pogo-stick!

Open Streets are events during which a street is temporarily closed to vehicle traffic to allow families and neighbors to come together for an afternoon to mingle, have fun and shop in a safe, car-free environment. The main goal is to encourage residents, including people who are not regularly active, to experience their community in a new and refreshing way – on their feet and in the street. It's also about helping people feel a connection to their community as well as how policies can be improved to help support the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists.

The concept, sometimes known as “ciclovia,” originated in South America. The events have become popular across the United States and recently appeared in Minnesota thanks to Blue Cross' support. The Fargo/Moorhead area held the first event in 2010 and Minneapolis followed suit in 2011.

To continue to encourage this growing movement, Blue Cross made additional sponsorships available this

spring to support cities' and organizations' efforts in planning Open Streets events. Five organizations were chosen to receive the sponsorship dollars to plan a total of six events. Two other organizations that Blue Cross currently supports through its active living program are also planning three events. The cities where Open Streets events will occur this year include:

Albert Lea – June 2, 2012, organized by City of Albert Lea and the National Vitality Center Leadership Team

St. Cloud – June 6, 2012, organized by the St. Cloud Downtown Alliance Foundation

Minneapolis (Lyndale Ave.) – June 10, 2012, organized by the Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition

Minneapolis (Lowry Ave.) – Fall 2012 (date TBD), organized by the Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition

Dilworth – July 24, 2012, organized by the City of Dilworth Park Board

Fargo/Moorhead – July 15 and Aug. 26, 2012, organized by Active In Moorhead and Cass Clay Healthy People

Rochester – Fall 2012 (date TBD), organized by United Way Olmstead and Active Living Rochester

Richfield – Sept 16, 2012, organized by the City of Richfield and Penn Central

"Blue Cross is proud to support the expanding Open Streets movement in Minnesota this year. Our state's overweight and obesity rates are at dangerous levels, and getting active is one of the best ways to combat this problem," said Dr. Marc Manley, chief prevention officer for Blue Cross. "At Open Streets events *everyone* can participate – it's like a 'marathon for the masses' that promotes good public health by encouraging active, healthy lifestyles. It also promotes environmentally friendly transportation choices, and local business benefit by the increase in foot traffic."

In addition to moving around and socializing in a car-free environment, events typically include recreational activities along the street, classes on bike safety and repair, and sometime activities like dance lessons, aerobics, yoga and musical performances. No registration is required. There's no start or finish line and people can change direction at any time along the route, as long as they move on their own power.

"Residents and businesses enthusiastically embrace these events as they recognize it as a tremendous opportunity to interact with each other and show case their neighborhood," said Colin Harris, Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition board vice president. "We're looking forward to more exciting events this year!"

Learn more by viewing videos of the Fargo/Moorhead or Minneapolis events at <http://bit.ly/JYRV4i> and openstreetsmpls.com. For information on Blue Cross' active living work visit bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota and click on the active living tab. Additional information on National Open Streets movement can be found at openstreetsproject.org.

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 as a health company: to promote a wider, more economical and timely availability of health services for the people of Minnesota. Blue Cross is a not-for-profit, taxable organization. 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 to learn more about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

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