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## **LOCAL BUSINESSES SHARE INSIGHTS WITH RIVER HEIGHTS CHAMBER AND ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER MINNESOTA**

*Focus group provides real world clarity on health care costs*

**Inver Grove Heights** - Area businesses owners told researchers that the skyrocketing costs of employee health care benefits are unsustainable, even in the short term. A group of local businesses met today in a focus group cosponsored by the River Heights Chamber of Commerce and the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota.

The focus group lasted a little over an hour and included businesses like Alarm & Communication Systems, Microtel Inns and Suites, OnSITE Drug Testing & Consulting, and Ultimate Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning. Together they discussed a variety of topics and concerns relating to the cost and consumption of health care.

"I wish the costs of health care were more transparent," said Jon Erickson, co-owner of Ultimate Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning. "My customers know exactly the quality of carpet cleaning service they're getting for the price and we walk away thanking one another. With health care, it's hard to know what I'm getting for the price."

The business owners were shocked to learn that the CDC reports that 75 percent of employers' health care costs are related to employee lifestyle choice and many discussed examples of how they have sought options for offering incentives and information on how to make healthier choices easier for their employees.

"Not only are we gaining some insights about the frustrations and potential needs of companies, but we are finding that these companies seem to enjoy having a venue where they can talk to peers about these common, pressing issues", said Jennifer Gale, president, River Heights Chamber of Commerce.

Today's focus group is one in a series of focus groups hosted by the Alliance throughout the state. These focus group meetings are designed to help businesses formulate their thoughts and needs behind their frustrations with health care, determining the kinds of information that they seek, and giving input on how they would they would like to receive that information. Based upon this feedback, the Alliance will seek opportunities to find a way to tailor information and tools to meet the needs of small and medium sized businesses.

“We know that businesses are struggling with healthcare – from information overload, to information clarity and options for solutions,” said Matt Hughes, Executive Director of the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota’s Small Business Alliance. “Without question, clear options provide power. But before businesses can be helped, we must know what *they* determine is needed.”

The Alliance for a Healthier MN is a public-private partnership that includes a group of Minnesota companies joined together to create fun, engaging and informative events and competitions to help Minnesotans get and stay healthy. Members of the Alliance include Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Cargill, General Mills, Medica, Medtronic, Midwest Dairy Association, Target, UnitedHealth Group along with the Minnesota Department of Health’s Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). Learn more at [MNAlliance.org](http://MNAlliance.org).

Many businesses in Dakota County are taking steps toward making it easier for employees to make healthy choices at work through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). SHIP is designed to help Minnesotans live longer, healthier lives by preventing the leading causes of chronic disease: tobacco and obesity. In Dakota County, SHIP is supporting the efforts of businesses to provide healthy food service and catering options, healthy vending, and access to community supported agriculture. Dakota County SHIP is also connecting workplaces with tobacco cessation tools and services including face-to-face counseling. SHIP was launched as part of Minnesota’s Vision for a Better State of Health, the bipartisan health reform package enacted in 2008.