The Challenge: Recent data shows that 39 percent of third- through fifth-graders, 23 percent of high school students, and 64 percent of adults in Wisconsin are obese or overweight. The epidemic of obesity leads to increases in chronic diseases that have catastrophic effects on public health and medical costs. While many groups and organizations are working independently to address and prevent obesity, there is a need to coalesce efforts to avoid duplication and competition when moving research, public health and policy initiatives forward.

Project Goal: This project aimed to build and sustain the statewide Wisconsin Obesity Prevention Network (WOPN) based in a collective impact framework. The framework aims for collaborative participants to achieve a common agenda, create backbone support infrastructure, identify shared measurement systems, conduct mutually reinforcing activities and allow for continuous communication.

Results: WOPN has built organizational capacity and continues to serve as the support infrastructure of the effort by facilitating communication, building coordination and promoting collaboration around obesity prevention strategies and interventions statewide. Through WOPN’s efforts, an additional 50 organizations are now working together towards common goals. A statewide common agenda was established with input from advisors across the state representing government, nonprofits, the private sector and communities. Statewide priorities have been identified in the following settings: early childhood, schools, community-built environment and community-food systems/food retail.

Additionally, WOPN staff initiated or facilitated community-academic partnerships, which have brought together faculty from urban and regional planning, local food systems and food economies, dietetics and community studies with community leaders in local and state government, cooperative extension and nonprofit organizations. Successes of these partnerships include:

- The Wisconsin Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative worked with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families on the statewide quality improvement system for childcare providers, influencing them to change physical activity criteria from 60 to 90 minutes daily and expand the nutrition criteria to include breastfeeding and youth gardening.
- WOPN received several grants including one to work on statewide public education and messaging to improve physical exercise by ensuring access to safe streets, and another grant to expand physical activity and education opportunities in school districts in Crawford County and the Fox Valley as well as the Northwest region of the state.

WOPN significantly contributed to the planning and development of the Partnership Program’s 2014 Obesity Prevention Initiative, which invested $8.6 million over five years. In 2015, WOPN changed its name to healthTIDE (healthTIDE.org).