



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Danielle McCallum

Healthy Savings/Solutran

763-519-7215

dmccallum@solutran.com

Marsha Pitts-Phillips

Greater Twin Cities United Way

612-340-7401

Marsha.Pitts-Phillips@gtcuw.org

Greg Bury

Medica

952-992-8437

greg.bury@medica.com

Partnership expands to bring healthy food options to low income families

Does affordable fresh produce + skill building in cooking preparation for busy, low income families = improved health outcomes?

(Minneapolis – May 12, 2016) — A unique local consortium is teaming up with the goal of improving diets of low income families, one bite and measurement at a time. With the aim of making it easier to access healthy foods through the combination of financial support, health benefits, and technology, the Minnesota Hunger Initiative (MNHI) – originally convened by Greater Twin Cities United Way – is partnering with Medica Research Institute, Solutran and the University of Minnesota Extension.

MNHI officials have outlined the multi-pronged approach: Build upon the success of the 2014 and 2015 program in which low income families were provided access to the **Healthy Savings**[®] program provided by Solutran to buy discounted produce and other healthy foods that resulted in changed eating habits; tap into the expertise of University of Minnesota Extension staff to educate families and individuals about how to shop for and prepare healthy foods; and leverage the expertise of investigators at the Medica Research Institute to measure and analyze program outcomes.

During the current 12-week Healthy Savings campaign that began in February, participants get up to \$20 in free fresh fruits and vegetables each week. They receive additional savings on other nutritious staples such as eggs, lean meats, milk, whole grain bread, yogurt, and more. The Healthy Savings program's success is centered on simplicity. Participants receive Healthy Savings cards with healthy food savings pre-loaded onto their account each week and can shop at Cub Foods, Rainbow Foods, and Lunds and Byerlys.

Five Minnesota Hunger and other partner food shelf programs – Community Emergency Assistance Programs (CEAP) in Brooklyn Park, Intercongregational Communities Association (ICA) in Minnetonka, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center in Minneapolis, Echo Food Shelf in Mankato, and Family Pathways in Forest Lake – recruited, enrolled and supported participants for the program, building on their existing relationships with people they served.

“This is a win-win and a major step in the effort to create healthier communities,” said Patty Wilder, project lead for the Minnesota Hunger Initiative. “Healthier communities mean kids do better in school, adults have fewer sick days at work, and health systems see fewer people with chronic issues.”

Participants are learning how to shop for and cook healthier foods through a grocery store tour with a nutrition educator and through cooking classes organized by University of Minnesota Extension services. The classes feature well-known and talented chefs such as Thomas Boehmer, from restaurants the Corner Table and Revival.

CeAnn Klug, University of Minnesota Extension, said: “We’re using evidenced-based coursework and training and combining it with other incentives, technology and research. The combined effort has great likelihood of helping populations that are financially stretched.”

Medica Research Institute economist, Angela Fertig, PhD, will assess changes in behavior and outcomes among participants that result from the intervention. “There is a great need to understand how best to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables by food-insecure households,” she said. “If we can identify the most impactful factors in changing eating habits toward more nutritious choices, we can use that knowledge to address the health of our nation and the costs of health care.”

“We are passionate about making healthy food more affordable,” said Chad Kelly, CMO of Solutran, and general manager of Healthy Savings. “With our advanced S3 technology we are able to make that a reality for the families in Minnesota and other areas of the country.”

Greater Twin Cities United Way launched the “Stop the Growl” Cause Campaign which raised nearly \$85,000 for this Healthy Savings program campaign. Solutran donated both time and \$10,000 to support Stop the Growl.

MNHI’s Patty Wilder sums up why the program is successful: “This is an incredible example of a powerful collective impact initiative where everyone’s goals are to increase the health of those whom we serve.”

Program participants receive the following:

- Healthy Savings Card loaded for 12 weeks of free produce; continued benefits for healthier foods; and benefits to shop at local farmers’ markets;
- Cooking class to learn knife, nutrition, and safety tips;
- Kitchen supplies for easier and faster cooking;
- A grocery store tour where participants learn how to use the Healthy Savings Card, tips on reading labels, weighing food and budgeting;
- A dietary log to measure current and post-pilot eating habits;
- At the end of the project, a survey to measure behavioral changes.

About Healthy Savings

Healthy Savings is a program for participants to save on healthier foods without having to clip, print or download coupons. Discounts are pre-loaded on to participant accounts each week and activated with a simple scan of a barcode from a card or mobile phone at checkout of participating retail stores. The technology for Healthy Savings was developed by Solutran, Inc. a Minnesota technology company in the financial services industry.

About the Minnesota Hunger Initiative

The Minnesota Hunger Initiative (formerly the Twin Cities Hunger Initiative), convened by Greater Twin Cities United Way, is an alliance of hunger relief agencies collaborating to end hunger in the region. Initiative partners include: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis; Community Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP); Family Pathways, The Food Group; Greater Twin Cities United Way; Hunger Solutions Minnesota; Intercongregational Communities Association (ICA); Keystone Community Services; Loaves and Fishes Too; Matter; Metro Meals on Wheels; Minnesota Department of Human Services/Office of Economic Opportunities; Minnesota FoodShare; Neighborhood House; NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center; Open Arms, Minnesota; Pillsbury United Communities; Second Harvest Heartland; University of Minnesota Extension Services; Valley Outreach, and Volunteers Enlisted to Assist People (VEAP). MNHI also works with other various businesses and nonprofits to address hunger.

About Solutran

Solutran is a Minneapolis-based technology company whose mission is to serve clients with innovative, reliable and responsive technology solutions. Solutran invented the technology for Healthy Savings, which is designed to improve the way America eats. Solutran is a national leader in retail and grocery payments, consumer incentive payments and WIC (Women, Infants and Children) payments. For more information visit www.Solutran.com, www.HealthySavings.com or call 888-SOLUTRAN (888-765-8872).

About Medica Research Institute

The Medica Research Institute (Minneapolis, Minnesota) conducts leading-edge research to inform high-value health care, promote health, and improve lives. Institute investigators explore key issues in health and health care in collaboration with experts across the nation and regionally that share in its vision to measurably improve health outcomes for all, especially the most vulnerable. To learn more, visit MedicaResearchInstitute.org.

About University of Minnesota Extension

University of Minnesota Extension delivers on the University's land-grant mission, connecting the public with scientific knowledge and expertise. Through a unique partnership of the University, federal, state and county governments, and private donors, Extension “extends” the University into all parts of the state. Together, Extension and its partners improve economic, social and environmental conditions through research and education, engaging with Minnesotans to address today's complex issues in food and agriculture, communities, environment, youth and families. Extension helps communities and individuals navigate in difficult times, making better decisions and strengthening our collective ability to address our most challenging issues. For more information, visit www.extension.umn.edu.

###