

Health & Wellness Plan



N

o

B

O

Letter from Library Director

Dear Community Members,

I'm excited to share the completion of the **Northborough Free Library's Health and Wellness Plan**—a first-of-its-kind initiative developed in direct response to the needs we witnessed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, when the library was closed and in-person connection was scarce, we heard from many of you just how vital the library is—not only as a source of information, but as a social and emotional anchor. People missed not just the books, but the conversations, the programs, and the sense of place. That loss underscored something we've always known: libraries are essential to community wellbeing.

Inspired by those experiences, and by our work with the Be Well Northborough initiative—an incredible cross-departmental partnership focused on community health—we began asking bigger questions: How does the library fit into the broader picture of public wellness? How do we tell that story? How do we support our staff and partners in doing this work sustainably?

This plan is our answer. It reflects months of listening to community members, engaging with local data, attending town meetings, and collaborating with departments and organizations across Northborough. It gives shape to what we've seen and felt: that mental and physical wellness are deeply connected to library services, and that we have a role to play in addressing social isolation, information overload, economic stress, health literacy, and more.

As librarians, we are not doctors, counselors, or case managers—but we are trusted information professionals and community connectors. Through thoughtful partnerships, intentional programming, and improved communication, we can help amplify the work of others, and help support the community's health and wellness goals.

Ultimately, this plan does three things:

- It aligns our mission with community priorities.
- It supports and amplifies the incredible services the library provides to the community.
- It lays the groundwork for creative, sustainable service improvements in the years ahead.

Thank you for inspiring this work—and for continuing to see the library as a vital part of Northborough's future.

Warmly,

Jennifer Bruneau
Director
Northborough Free Library



**“...libraries
are not only
centers of
learning,
but also vital
partners in
community
well-being.”**

Executive Summary

The Northborough Free Library launched the Health and Wellness Planning Project in 2024 to better understand how it could support the evolving health and wellness needs of the community post pandemic. This effort was rooted in the belief that libraries are not only centers of learning, but also vital partners in community well-being. As part of a broader town-wide focus on health, the library sought to identify opportunities where its services, programs, and partnerships could make the greatest impact.

This planning effort builds on the library's longstanding commitment to serving residents across all ages and backgrounds. The project aimed to uncover where health and wellness intersect with library services from access to trusted health information, to programming that supports mental, physical, and social well-being.

Findings from the project revealed several important community priorities, including:

- Social isolation and community connectedness,
- Organizational capacity within the library and opportunities for partnership within the community,
- The connection between mental and physical health,
- Ability to access and understand health literacy,
- Strengthening health literacy through access to reputable health information.

The insights gathered helped shape the health and wellness priorities to position Northborough Free Library as a proactive, collaborative partner in advancing Northborough's overall health and wellness goals. The plan reflects the community's desire for inclusive, responsive, and innovative approaches to supporting well-being—and the library's readiness to lead in this space.



Methodology

The Health and Wellness planning process gathered input from a wide range of community stakeholders at multiple points throughout the project. A variety of methods were used to collect ideas and perspectives. Three key documents were reviewed to provide background context:

- Metrowest Community Health Assessment from the Metrowest Health Foundation (2023)
- Town of Northborough Family and Youth Services Department Review by the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management (2023)
- Northborough Health and Human Services Strategic Assessment prepared by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (March 2024)

To better understand the needs and interests of Northborough residents, a community survey was conducted to gather feedback on potential health and wellness programs and services the library could offer. 191 community members provided feedback. The survey was open from September 16 to October 2, 2024, and promoted through the library newsletter, social media, flyers in municipal buildings, and the communication channels of Be Well Northborough stakeholders.

Community engagement continued with several events hosted at the Northborough Free Library. Focus groups offered the opportunity for in-depth conversations with 26 stakeholders across four sessions. Participants included the Friends of the Library, Library Trustees, the Be Well municipal team, and community members. In addition, four one-on-one interviews were conducted with library leadership, key municipal officials, and community leaders. Staff engagement played a critical role in shaping the plan. Two staff input sessions were held, and preliminary versions of the plan were presented to both staff and trustees, resulting in further feedback and refinement.

The priorities and goals in this plan are a result of multiple community engagement opportunities, and reflect the intersecting health and wellness needs of the community. These priorities are informed by both the background research and consultant-led community engagements.

Planning Team

Jennifer Bruneau

Library Director

Kaitlin Stacy

Assistant Library Director

Maura Deedy

Local Librarian Consulting Consultant



B

Connected



O

We build relationships, creating opportunities for our community to foster meaningful connections, and a sense of belonging.

Create programs and spaces encouraging meaningful interactions between community members of all ages.

1. Design library spaces, resources, and programs that are accessible.
2. Engage with the community by participating in local events, building relationships, and being present in the spaces where people gather.
3. Cultivate and develop relationships with municipal departments for high-quality service delivery.
4. Develop clear policies and procedures to ensure secure, equitable, and confidential access to information and resources.





Informed

We provide our community with access to information and opportunities for life long learning, empowering decision making.

1. Promote health literacy by providing access to reputable resources.
2. Ensure community members have the skills to navigate and evaluate information in a changing world.
3. Build a wellness hub with information and health and wellness materials.
4. Curate thoughtful collections with input from community members.
5. Strengthen library marketing strategies, balancing reach with meaningful engagement.
6. Invest in a culture of staff training and development.



A photograph of a group of people in a fitness class. They are seated in chairs and have their arms raised in the air. The woman in the foreground is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. The background is blurred.

N

♂

B Active

○

We inspire participation, engagement, and action through physical programs and community organizations.

1. Integrate physical movement into select library programs.
2. Empower community members to engage in volunteerism and local government
3. Support lifelong wellness through programs, services and partnerships.
4. Embody a culture that supports health and wellness for library staff.
5. Seek out sustainable funding sources to support health and wellness efforts.

