



Healthy Worksite • Healthy Workforce • Healthy Communities

## The National Healthy Worksite Program

Faced with high health care costs, many employers are turning to workplace health programs to help employees adopt healthier lifestyles and lower their risk of developing costly chronic diseases while improving worker productivity. In October 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began the National Healthy Worksite Program (NHWP). The NHWP is designed to assist employers in implementing science- and practice-based prevention and wellness strategies that will lead to specific, measurable health outcomes to reduce chronic disease rates. The program seeks to promote good health through prevention, to reduce chronic illness and disability, and to improve productivity outcomes that contribute to employers' competitiveness.

### **For many employers, high health care costs place their businesses at a competitive disadvantage in global markets.**

The rising gap between the growth in health care spending and overall economic growth means that a larger share of resources is being devoted to health relative to other expenses, such as wages and other employee benefits, capital expenditures, and business operations.

Health care costs cannot be controlled without maintaining and improving the health of employees and reducing employees' risk of developing costly chronic diseases. Employers can create healthy work environments through workplace health promotion programs, policies, and practices that make it easier for employees to make healthy choices. Maintaining a healthier workforce can lower direct costs such as insurance premiums and worker compensation claims, and positively impact many indirect costs such as absenteeism and worker productivity.<sup>1-4</sup>

By implementing and expanding science-based strategies documented to effectively change unhealthy behaviors and improve health outcomes, comprehensive workplace wellness programs offer employers the opportunity not only to improve the health of their employees, but also to control health care spending driven largely by chronic diseases. For example, a 1% reduction in the following risk factors—excess weight and elevated blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol—has been shown to save \$83 to \$103 annually in medical costs per person, much of which could accrue to employers in reduced premiums.<sup>5</sup>

*The National Healthy Worksite Program will help employers resist short-term cost-cutting or cost shifting measures in favor of long-term sustainable investments in employee health.*



The NHWP will assist over 100 small, mid-sized and large employers in establishing comprehensive workplace health programs (WHPs) targeting employees at risk due to **physical inactivity, poor nutrition, obesity** and/or **tobacco use**. These WHPs will use science-based workplace programs, policies, practices and environmental supports to maximize employee participation in wellness-related activities, raise employee awareness and knowledge about health concerns, and establish a work environment aimed at supporting healthy lifestyle choices.

### The Cost Burden of Chronic Disease

Each year in the United States, chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, arthritis and diabetes cause 7 in 10 deaths and account for about 75% of the \$2 trillion spent on medical care.<sup>6</sup> Obesity alone is a significant health care cost driver. The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index data for 2011 show full-time workers in the U.S. who are overweight or obese and have other chronic health problems miss about 450 million more days of work each year than healthy workers, resulting in an estimated cost of more than \$153 billion in lost productivity annually.<sup>7</sup>

### The goals of the NHWP are to:

- Reduce the risk of chronic disease among employees through science-based workplace interventions and promising practices.
- Promote sustainable and replicable workplace health activities and organizational practices.
- Promote peer-to-peer business mentoring.

### Participating employers

Participating employers will be selected from eight local sites across the country. The eight local communities are: Somerset County, ME (Skowhegan); Shelby County, TN (Memphis); Marion County, IN (Indianapolis); Harris County, TX (Houston); Buchanan County, MO (St. Joseph); Kern County, CA (Bakersfield); Pierce County, WA (Tacoma); and Philadelphia County, PA (Philadelphia).



Each participating employer will receive intensive onsite support and expertise over a one-year period, putting in place a combination of program, policy, and environmental interventions to support physical activity, good nutrition, and tobacco cessation.

Worksites will participate in a stepwise approach to create or improve a workplace health program including the following science-based activities and promising practices:

- An assessment to define employee health and safety risks and concerns and describe current health promotion activities, capacity and needs.
- A planning process to develop a workplace health program that includes goal determination; selecting priority interventions; and building organizational infrastructure, such as establishing a wellness committee and engaging senior leadership.
- Program implementation involving all the steps needed to put selected health promotion programs, policies, practices, and environmental supports into place and make them available to employees, including but not limited to:
  - Stairwell enhancement, physical fitness/lifestyle counseling, walking trails/clubs, flexible scheduling policies.
  - Worksite farmer's market, nutrition counseling/education, menu labeling, healthy foods in cafeterias and vending, weight management counseling.
  - Tobacco-free campus policy, subsidized quit-smoking counseling (quitlines, health plans).<sup>8-11</sup>
- An evaluation of efforts to systematically investigate the reach, quality, and effectiveness of the workplace health program.

In addition to receiving significant support to establish comprehensive health promotion programs, participating employers will build their skill and capacity to manage and sustain their wellness and health promotion investments. Capacity-building activities include a series of trainings, as well as participation in community coalitions whose goal is to build networks and identify opportunities to leverage existing community-based resources.

On-going evaluation of the individual worksite health promotion programs will track changes in employee knowledge, behavior and productivity, as well as changes in employer health and safety culture. Evaluation efforts will also capture best practices for implementing core workplace health programs, and document unique challenges and barriers experienced by employers and strategies to overcome them.

Through technical assistance, case studies, success stories, and information forums, the information gathered throughout the program will be shared broadly with participating employers, as well as other employers and organizations nationwide interested in creating or expanding their own healthy worksite programs.

2011 also marked the launch of Million Hearts, a CDC and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) initiative to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes over the next five years. The initiative focuses on two main goals: empowering Americans to make healthy choices, and improving care for people, focusing on the ABCS (Aspirin for people at risk, Blood pressure control, Cholesterol management and Smoking cessation.) The National Health Worksite Program supports Million Hearts efforts in the workplace.



For more information go to [www.cdc.gov/NationalHealthyWorksite/](http://www.cdc.gov/NationalHealthyWorksite/)



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