

Participating in the CDC's National Healthy Worksite Program

Before participating in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Healthy Worksite Program (NHWP), Greater Lakes Mental Healthcare (GLMHC) had a health promotion committee and some initiatives and supports in place to promote good employee health. They included tobacco cessation counseling, healthy food options in the cafeteria and vending machines, and nutritional information (e.g., calories, sodium, fats) on the foods available for purchase on site. However, the center's CEO and senior leadership team were committed to doing more to address the core value of promoting employee health and well-being.

GLMHC applied principles of implementing a comprehensive workplace health promotion program learned during the NHWP by putting in place a combination of programs, policies, and environmental supports to address multiple areas of employee health.

GLMHC clients have high death rates from chronic disease associated with tobacco use. Center leadership hoped that promoting healthier lifestyles among staff would help them become positive role models for GLMHC clients. GLMHC was interested in support from the NHWP because the center's leadership team felt it lacked the knowledge and skills to

plan and put into place a comprehensive worksite wellness program.

With support and commitment from senior management, Human Resources employees Karla Siedschlag and Sarah Fusetti began improving GLMHC's existing wellness program as soon the center was accepted into the NHWP. One of the first NHWP activities GLMHC completed was a baseline assessment in 2013. The NHWP assessments included employee health surveys covering health conditions, healthy behaviors, and perceptions about the work environment, as well as biometric screenings.

Like all of the employers participating in the NHWP, GLMHC also completed the [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#), a validated organizational tool designed to help employers assess the extent to which they have implemented evidence-based health promotion interventions.

Organization Background

Greater Lakes Mental Healthcare

- « Established in 1964
- « Industry: Nonprofit health care and social assistance
- « Locations: Lakewood and Tacoma, Washington
- « 350 Employees

Greater Lakes Mental Healthcare (GLMHC) is a full-service community mental health center that has provided behavioral health care services to the citizens of Pierce County, Washington, for over 50 years. The center's mission is to improve mental health for children, adults, and families by providing a comfortable setting for counseling and medication services. Its vision is that the clients it serves will receive behavioral health care that brings relief, hope, and recovery.

One of GLMHC's core values is to "promote healthy options for clients and staff as an integral part of its work."

Setting Meaningful Goals

After receiving the results of the 2013 assessments, the GLMHC wellness committee decided to focus on health behaviors that had high employee interest and needed improvement. It identified the areas of tobacco use, physical activity, and nutrition, and set the following objectives:

- Promote tobacco cessation among employees and clients by becoming a tobacco-free campus.
- Raise the percentage of employees who are physically active both during work hours and during personal time.
- Increase the percentage of employees who eat at least five daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

Using a program planning tool from the NHWP, the committee developed a detailed plan to meet these objectives through multiple intervention strategies. For each strategy, the plan specified the following:

- How and when the strategy would be implemented (including who was responsible for each action).
- How the committee would communicate to employees.
- How the committee would evaluate whether the strategy was implemented and how effective it was (e.g., level of participation, employee satisfaction).

Siedschlag and Fusetti participated in all NHWP trainings and webinars that addressed the main developmental stages for a wellness program, which are assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. They also had monthly technical assistance calls with CDC staff to share updates and get advice and information resources.

Program Overview

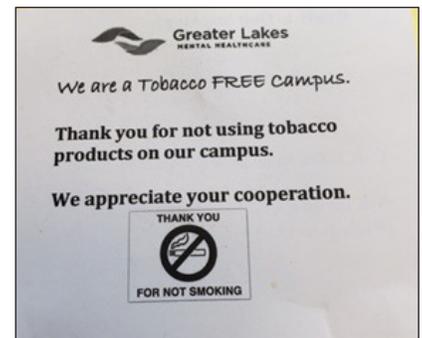
Throughout GLMHC's participation in the NHWP, the wellness committee met monthly to discuss and plan current and upcoming efforts. The committee maintained a core group of 4-5 members who were responsible for putting components of the program in place. To promote transparency and inclusiveness, monthly meetings were open to all GLMHC employees who wanted to participate. The committee also created a high-visibility "wellness wall" in the employee breakroom, with information and sign-up sheets for programs, wellness articles, healthy recipes, and information about local fun runs.

Creating a Tobacco-Free Campus

GLMHC's tobacco goal was to provide a completely tobacco-free environment for all staff and clients. This initiative was the center's greatest success, thanks to methodical planning and implementation. The wellness committee and management team recruited staff, clients, and board members to help form a tobacco-free campus committee. The committee set a launch date (1 year in the future) for a tobacco-free campus policy as the centerpiece of the initiative. To prepare for the launch, the committee collected tobacco cessation information from GLMHC's health benefits provider and its employee assistance

program, as well as from the Washington State Quitline and the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department. The health department, which also participated in the NHWP, provided technical assistance and resources to the tobacco-free campus committee and met with its members monthly during the planning phase.

One of the hallmarks of the planning process was clear and consistent communication about the upcoming policy. GLMHC informed all staff and clients through multiple channels that the campus would be tobacco-free starting November 3, 2014. Staff and clients received written information about the new policy and about tobacco cessation resources available to help them quit. Managers reminded employees about the policy, and they in turn reminded clients. GLMHC posted a countdown clock in the main lobby, showing how many weeks



*Tobacco free campus reminder card.
Photo provided by GLMHC.*

remained before the policy would take effect. The center also posted other signs about the policy and where to find tobacco cessation resources around its campus.

“We realized we couldn’t flip a switch and have a tobacco-free campus. It was a process that required continuously reminding people that it was going to happen.”

—Karla Siedschlag, Human Resources Manager, GLMHC

The tobacco-free campus committee conducted a series of focus groups to hear feedback from staff and clients about the upcoming policy change. By listening to employees’ and clients’ needs and concerns, GLMHC was in the best possible position to address these issues, connect staff and clients with the cessation resources they needed, and put the new policy into place smoothly.

The committee promoted all available cessation resources, including counseling groups, reimbursement for nicotine replacement therapy, and the Washington State Quitline. Knowing when the policy was coming helped increase employees’ motivation to seek out cessation resources before the policy took effect. When the tobacco-free campus policy launched, GLMHC celebrated the event by putting up signs and balloons to demonstrate the center’s new commitment to improving employee and client health.

Getting Employees Moving at Work and at Home

To meet its physical activity objective, the wellness committee encouraged staff to be active at work and at home. GLMHC put physical activity programs and environmental supports in place, and the committee used e-mails, announcements at staff meetings, flyers on the wellness wall and other bulletin boards, and notices in the employee newsletter to promote these initiatives.

GLMHC distributed the [Takoma-Pierce County Walking Guide](#) and promoted nearby walking routes to encourage staff to walk during breaks and lunch. The center also promoted walking and standing

meetings to get people moving. It used the slogan “Walk the Talk,” and members of the management team and wellness committee led by example.

Promoting Physical Activity and Camaraderie Through Challenges

To keep its wellness program interesting, the wellness committee developed a series of 4-week physical activity challenges with the goal of building stamina and strength through increasingly difficult benchmark goals. For example, during the “ab” challenge, employees worked up to doing 125 consecutive abdominal crunches by the end of the fourth week. The “push-up” challenge, “tricep dip” challenge, and “squat-athon” that followed focused on other major muscle groups and were also designed to increase the number of repetitions each week. Other challenges, like the “plank-athon” and “chair wall sit” set target times rather than repetitions (e.g., increase from 20 seconds to 2 minutes).

The committee selected activities that could be completed in a couple of minutes in work clothes with no equipment. It posted a sign-up sheet and information for each challenge on the wellness wall.



*GLMHC employees “planking” at work.
Photo provided by GLMHC.*

A diverse group of employees participated in the challenges. About 20 employees participated on a regular basis, and the number of participants increased over time. Some employees participated in every challenge, while others were more selective. Some employees performed the activities several times a day, and some performed the activities with coworkers. The wellness committee sent an e-mail each day with a meeting time and place for employees who wanted to perform their activity as part of a group.

Fusetti said she thought the challenges inspired camaraderie among the staff, and she noticed that natural champions emerged to encourage their coworkers. Committee members said they thought participation grew over time because excitement caught on, and employees saw that the challenges were supportive, not intimidating. The committee understood that increasing the range of activities, access, and opportunities for employees to get involved in a way that was comfortable for them built participation and engagement over time.

Building a Comprehensive Approach to Physical Activity

The wellness committee used CDC's [StairWELL to Better Health](#) initiative to encourage its staff to use the stairs instead of the elevator. For example, it posted signs describing the benefits of taking the stairs near elevators and stairwells. GLMHC also provided a "Fitness Box" that included stretch bands, yoga mats, small hand weights, and DVDs for staff to use during work breaks. Three to four employees, including the CEO, watched exercise DVDs together at lunch on a daily basis. The committee reminded employees at staff meetings and in the employee newsletter of these resources to encourage their use. Managers and supervisors encouraged employees to take breaks in the morning and afternoon for brief exercise or stretch sessions. Management supported participation and sent positive reinforcements through e-mails, announcements, and reminders at staff meetings.

GLMHC also encouraged employees to walk, run, or bike during nonworking hours. It promoted the Tacoma-Pierce County Walking Guide and supported participation and feedback from staff members. The wellness committee also promoted physical activity

opportunities, such as fun runs and walks, available through local groups like Pierce County Parks and Recreation and Metro Parks Tacoma.

Encouraging Healthier Eating

To help achieve GLMHC's nutrition objective, the wellness committee began providing healthier food options at work events and meetings. The committee also used resources from the Puget Sound Farm Guide to promote the many farmers' markets in the area. The committee promoted these resources through e-mails, announcements at staff meetings, flyers on bulletin boards, and notices in the employee newsletter.

GLMHC also worked to increase employees' nutrition knowledge by holding lunch-and-learn sessions on various topics related to healthy eating. For example, a nutritionist presented "Digestion 101" to educate employees about how different foods affect the digestive system. To encourage healthier eating, the wellness committee also posted healthy recipe ideas on the wellness wall.

Bringing Together Multiple Healthy Elements

To combine the benefits of healthy eating and increased physical activity, the wellness committee organized an 8-week weight-loss challenge in November and December 2014. Fifty employees participated in some portion of the challenge, and 36 lost weight and most others maintained their weight. Fusetti said she saw coworkers encouraging each other throughout the process. Employees noted that Monday morning weigh-ins motivated them to control their eating on weekends and during the holidays. The wellness committee created an e-mail group for participants and used it to highlight success stories. The challenge was successful, and GLMHC plans to do more in the future.

Program Success

After it finished the NHWP in 2015, GLMHC completed the CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard again as part of its follow-up assessment. The center increased its total ScoreCard score from 150 to 207 out of a possible 264 points. It made improvements in several areas, including its use of evidence-based interventions for its goal areas of tobacco, physical activity, and nutrition.

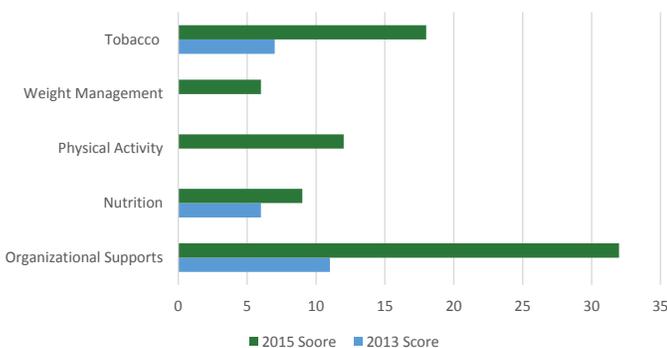
Some examples of the evidence-based strategies that GLMHC received points for in its 2015 ScoreCard, that it did not have in place in 2013, included the following:

- Actively enforcing a written policy banning tobacco use.

- Posting signs at elevators, stairwell entrances and exits, and other key locations to encourage employees to take the stairs.
- Providing educational seminars, workshops, or classes on physical activity.
- Providing free or subsidized body composition measurement, such as body mass index scores.

GLMHC made the largest gain in its score in the Organizational Supports module, which assesses the extent to which organizations have a foundation and infrastructure in place to support and maintain a workplace health promotion program. It now has a health promotion committee, offers health risk assessments, uses competitions to support employees' behavior changes, promotes health promotion programs to employees, has an annual health promotion budget, has strong leadership support, and sets annual organizational objectives for health promotion.

CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard Overall Score in Wellness Programming, 2013-2015



No smokers were among the 21 employees who completed both the 2013 and 2015 assessments. The percentage of these 21 employees who reported eating five or more daily servings of fruits and vegetables increased from 10% to 24%. The percentage engaging in little or no physical activity decreased from 67% to 33%. The percentage who were obese increased slightly, from 24% to 29%, but the percentage who were overweight decreased from 43% to 29%.

In 2013, a total of 113 employees completed the baseline health assessment. In 2015, a total of 51 employees completed the follow-up assessment, including 21 of the original 113.

2013 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile (Employees = 113)	
Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey	
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	7%
Engage in little or no physical activity	58%
Current smoker	13%
Biometric Screening	
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	28%
Obese (Body mass index ≥ 30)	43%

2015 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile (Employees = 51)*	
Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey	
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	12%
Engage in little or no physical activity	35%
Current smoker	4%
Biometric Screening	
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	29%
Obese (Body mass index ≥ 30)	31%
<i>*Percentages include all employees who provided data in 2015, including those who did not complete the 2013 assessments.</i>	

The majority of GLMHC employees (83%) were supportive of the environmental changes intended to create a safe and healthy culture at GLMHC, as well as the policy changes made as a result of GLMHC's healthy worksite program (70%). Two-thirds of employees who completed the 2015 assessment agreed that they were well-informed about the health and wellness opportunities at GLMHC, and 60% agreed that the worksite health program adds value to their job.

Challenges

The nature of the work done at GLMHC has motivated its staff to put health and wellness interventions into place, but it can also make the process challenging. GLMHC staff are passionate about their jobs and work hard to ensure that their clients get the best care possible. They often sacrifice personal time to dedicate more time to their clients, which makes it difficult for them to find time to engage in healthy behaviors themselves (e.g., trying a new healthy recipe, exercising after work). To overcome this challenge, GLMHC's wellness committee and

leadership team are working to make it the norm for employees to take time for themselves throughout the day to engage in behaviors that support personal health and well-being.

Although employees and clients complied with the tobacco-free policy with little complaint, some continued to smoke in neighboring parking lots. GLMHC approached a nearby retailer about implementing a tobacco-free policy at its site and offered to share resources, but the retailer was not interested.

What's Next?

The wellness committee and leadership team at GLMHC have been inspired to put additional health and wellness initiatives into place, thanks to their past successes. In particular, they plan to

- Expand the tobacco-free policy to GLMHC's satellite sites, which are residential facilities for clients.
- Provide resources from the American Heart Association to clients who have expressed interest in tobacco cessation.
- Use the process they developed for the tobacco-free campus policy change—planning ahead, gathering input from staff and clients, providing resources to support the transition—to implement other health-related policies and practices in the workplace.
- Apply for a Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department's Healthy Communities grant. This grant focuses on creating healthy food and beverage guidelines for food served at work and on putting physical activity policies and environmental supports into place in the workplace and in the broader community.



The National Healthy Worksite Program was designed to help employers put into action science- and practice-based disease-prevention and wellness strategies that would lead to specific measurable health outcomes to reduce chronic disease rates. From 2013-2015, each participant received support, training, and technical assistance to put in place a combination of program, policy and environmental interventions to support physical activity, good nutrition and tobacco-use cessation.