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ISSUE BRIEF

Provide Workplace Wellness Programs To All American Workers

Current Status:

More than 90 percent of large employers (200 or more workers) and more than 60 percent of smaller employers (3-199 workers) offer employees at least one wellness benefit, according to the 2012 Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research and Education Trust annual survey of employer health benefits.[1] As of 2010, only 17 states offered a range of wellness programs to state employees.[2] Workplace wellness benefits and programs can vary dramatically in their scope and may or may not be based on proven, evidence-driven strategies. Examples of wellness benefits can include: tobacco cessation programs, lunch and learn sessions, obesity management and nutrition counseling, and online tools including health assessments and customizable tools to help with diet, nutrition and fitness.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) expands employers' ability to reward employees who meet health status goals by participating in wellness programs up to 30 percent of employee benefit health costs in 2014. That means, employers can require employees who do not meet the goals to pay more for their employer-sponsored health coverage.

In 2011, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created the National Healthy Worksite Program, a $9 million, two-year program to help up to 100 small, mid-sized, and large businesses across the country set up and run evidence-based wellness programs. Each program participant will receive intensive support and expertise putting in place a combination of program, policy and environmental interventions to support physical activity, good nutrition and tobacco-use cessation. In addition, community participants will receive training and technical assistance as well as mentoring through peer relationships.[3]

Why Workplace Wellness Programs Matter:

- For every wellness dollar spent, studies have found, medical costs fall by about $3.27, and productivity increases, with absenteeism costs falling by about $2.37.[4]
- States provide health coverage for about seven million people, including 3.4 million state government employees and retirees, and their dependents and family members. Approximately eight percent of state health budgets go to state employee health.[5]
- Small businesses employ about half of the country's private sector workers and face growing health care costs and lost productivity related to obesity.[6]

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Recommendations:

- **The Federal government should implement a comprehensive, evidence-based wellness program for all federal employees so that all government workers have access to wellness programs.** Federal workplaces should offer comprehensive wellness programs that can serve as a model for other governmental and private workplaces.
- **Every state and local government should offer a comprehensive, evidence-based wellness program.** State and local governments should provide strong wellness programs to their employees.
- **Providing wellness programs to teachers and other educators should be a high priority.** Research shows wellness programs for educators not only benefit the adult participants but also have shown success in engaging teachers in promoting increased physical activity and improved nutrition among their students.
- **States should make wellness programs a key component of their Health Insurance Exchanges.** Exchanges should be active purchasers and encourage or require all qualified health plans in an exchange to offer evidence-based wellness programs.
- **Private employers — regardless of their size — should provide effective, evidence-based wellness opportunities for their employees.** Businesses should partner with government, hospitals and community-based organizations to offer wellness programs. Federal, state and local governments should offer increased tax incentives and other assistance, including providing education about the benefits of wellness programs, to help small business wellness programs get off the ground. Insurance plans should also offer financial incentives to small businesses that offer wellness programs. Community-based organizations can collaborate with small businesses to increase opportunities to support physical activity and other programs, and local hospitals or health care providers can offer free health screenings and classes on health.

HOW IT'S WORKING:

- **Logistics Health Incorporated (LHI), in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, partnered with Riverside Corporate Wellness (RCW), to create a comprehensive wellness program with a clinical component, which has up to an 80 percent participation or activation rate, and has led 98 percent of LHI employees to feel that the company emphasizes wellness and 99 percent to rate LHI's wellness programming as good to excellent.** RCW created an on-location primary care clinic at no cost to LHI employees and their families that provides access to health promotion and primary care services. In order to ensure effective and safe sharing of health care records and professional staffing, RCW also engaged multiple corporate and community stakeholders in the implementation of its clinic. LHI has implemented policies that allow its employees to fully utilize the wellness services, including providing three hours of paid time per week to participate in sponsored wellness activities.
- **The YMCA in the Coulee Region of Wisconsin created partnerships to encourage local businesses to support employee wellness programs.** Partnering with Gundersen Lutheran Health System and Mayo Health Systems, the Y created a Well Workplace Toolkit and recognition breakfast that encourages business to launch programs, policies and projects to support employee wellness within the workplace. They have also partnered with a local vending company to increase healthy food options in workplace vending machines.

POTENTIAL SAVINGS THROUGH PREVENTION OF CHRONIC DISEASES AMONG CALIFORNIA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM (CALPERS) STATE ACTIVE MEMBERS

California has the nation's largest pooled public employee program, which combines state, local government and schools on one state employee health plan. In 2011, CalPERS spent close to $7 billion to purchase health benefits for the state of California and for local and government agency and school employees.[7] In an effort to estimate the burden of preventable chronic diseases among CalPERS State Active Members, the Urban Institute conducted an analysis of potential savings if several common preventable conditions were addressed.

The analysis included hypertension and type 2 diabetes labeled as Cluster 1 conditions, and then added heart disease, stroke and renal disease, alone or combined with Cluster 1 conditions, and named them Cluster 2 conditions. The analysis evaluated over 2.5 million records of CalPERS State Active Members and dependants covered between 2004 and 2008 and calculated potential savings of Cluster 1 and 2 conditions that are preventable through changes in diet and physical activity.

Results showed that of the $1.6 billion spent in 2008 on State Active CalPERS members, $362 million—almost one-quarter of total spending, was attributable to preventable conditions from Cluster 1 and 2.[8] These estimates are considered conservative because they did not include any other diseases that could potentially be affected by interventions to improve diet, increase exercise and reduce smoking, and the analysis did not include costs associated with predisease or reducing the severity of conditions. Also, the cost estimates did not include any savings associated with improved productivity due to a healthier workforce. Estimates from the analysis suggest that a one percent reduction among State Active CalPERS members in common preventable conditions could save $3.6 million per year.[9]

The analysis was able to further break down spending based on gender, ethnicity, county, age and by department or agency and has the potential to inform CalPERS as they move forward in implementing future workplace wellness programs.

NEBRASKA'S INTEGRATED HEALTH PLAN

In 2009, the State of Nebraska launched a new integrated plan for health among state employees and their families. Prior to 2009, premiums had been increasing annually due to overutilization of health care services, poor preventive adherence, lack of attention towards early detection and continual escalation of premium rates. In response to increasing costs of health care the State developed a new wellness strategy known as wellnessoptions.[10]

State employees who qualify for the new health plan have lower premium costs, access to comprehensive preventive coverage and year-round wellness programs. In order to qualify, any employee or spouse needs to complete three steps on an annual basis: participants choose and enroll in their choice of a wellness program; participants complete a biometric screening option; and participants complete an online health assessment.[11]

A range of wellness programs are offered to enrolled State of Nebraska employees and their spouses, which include:[12]

- Walk This Way—a walking program where participants wear a pedometer and monitor their number of steps online;
- EMPOWERED Coaching: Lifestyle and Condition Management—participants work with a personal health coach to support healthy life changes related to physical activity, healthy eating, smoking cessation and stress management;
- NutriSum—an online weight management program;
- Cardio Log—an online tool allowing participants to track a variety of exercise workouts; and
- Biometric Screening—onsite and at home screenings are offered throughout the year.

Since the integration of Nebraska's new health plan, there have been significant improvements in some high risk areas. An analysis of health assessments from 2010 to 2011 found the following improvements:[13]

- 11.3 percent of those who were previously high risk for low levels of physical activity are now exercising more than two days per week.
- 7.7 percent who were previously high risk for low fruit and vegetable consumption are now eating more than three fruits and vegetables per day.
- Tobacco use among participants decreased from 9.3 percent to 7.8 percent.
- Those at high risk for depression decreased from 11.6 percent to 9.6 percent.

Along with health improvements, the State of Nebraska also saw a reduction of health care costs during the first two years of the program. When comparing wellness program participants' health costs to non-wellness participants, the State saw a reduction of $4.2 million in reduced medical and pharmacy claims. The return on investment for the program in the first two years found that for every $1.00 invested in wellness programs, $2.70 is returned in health care savings.[14]

Planting Health and Wellness Seeds: a Corporation's Mission to Help Their Employees, Clients and the Bottom Line

By Teresa Pulvermacher, MSN, NP-C, Director of Program Development/Operations Manager, Riverside Corporate Wellness

The mission of Logistics Health Incorporated (LHI), in La Crosse, Wisconsin, is to "take care of the people we serve through innovative health care solutions." This starts at the roots, their own employees, because without roots, branches do not flourish and sprout leaves.

Six years ago, Don Weber, founder and CEO of LHI, which helps their clients meet occupational health goals, began talking about planting the seeds of wellness and cultural landscaping to create a company-wide focus on health that could be transmitted to their clients.

Weber piloted small-scale health and wellness initiatives, i.e., the seeds, such as a wellness committee to get a feel for what employees might appreciate, influenza immunization programs and weekly wellness tips, which have sprouted into a health in all policies approach to decisions and client services.

LHI's offices are in the La Crosse Riverside Center, which is co-occupied by Riverside Corporate Wellness (RCW), an organization dedicated to promoting health and wellness through fitness, education programs and primary health.

Over the years, LHI has grown alongside their wellness partner, RCW, which has merged the pilot programs begun by Weber with an on-location primary care clinic at no cost to LHI employees and their families.

The primary objective of LHI and RCW is what forces a continual cultural shift towards a healthier, more balanced life. The goals are clear: improve employee health habits; develop and maintain a recognized corporate culture of wellness; develop and maintain the Corporate-Advance Wellness Home Model; and ensure sustainability. More simply put, LHI advanced wellness because employees are the corporation's most valuable resource — a healthy employee and family is happier and more productive.

The idea of merging an established and comprehensive wellness program with a clinical component is new and unique. The resulting services are specifically designed to meet employee and business needs—they are convenient, accessible and comprehensive. In a business community, this kind of care maximizes opportunities for preventive care and health promotion, while reducing unnecessary reliance on specialized, urgent and emergency care. The most important factor is convenience. If employees can have their health care needs met in less than one hour on a consistent basis, rather than having to use hours of personal time to visit a provider, their productivity, absenteeism and adherence to doctor/practitioner recommendations and health will improve.

LHI lives its company mission daily: always take care of the people they serve by providing innovative healthcare solutions that exceed expectations, are ethical and compassionate and fulfill the promises to employees, customers and communities. The combination of primary health services with a comprehensive wellness program, which includes frequent opportunities for health education, a readily accessible corporate fitness facility and specialized health risk programs, has transformed our sick care model into a true health care system, wherein we prevent disease from occurring rather than treating people after they become sick.

That said, it doesn't happen overnight or with a snap of the fingers. Lifestyles that are more healthcare cost-efficient, satisfying and balanced, and that lead to wellness and good health are difficult changes to initiate and/or maintain when financial resources are strained and other life issues take precedence.

So we try to make it as easy as possible for employees. For example, employees and their families can access no-cost health promotion and primary care services at the workplace. A visit to the onsite primary health clinic is no longer just a visit for a sore throat; but an opportunity to address lifestyle and health promotion. Finding time for physical activity is no longer a burden, but a cultural workplace norm: employees can take paid time away from their desks to go to the gym or take a fitness class.

In addition, primary care in the context of corporate wellness facilitates early detection and prevention of problems, even when there is not a heavy demand for such services involved in primary care. In every interaction with a health care provider, participation in wellness is carefully monitored and tracked. Extended visits to providers for traditional episodic care, and annual exams over an hour or longer, or even divided visits, afford the opportunity to address adherence to primary prevention strategies at all ages; well-infant and child exams; sports physicals; counseling on contraception, sexuality, drugs and alcohol for adolescents and young adults in the reproductive years; lifestyle management, nutrition and exercise in metabolic syndrome; and the prevention of diabetes and cancer. These visits provide time for assisted priority referrals to fitness coaching, alternative and integrative therapies, weight management, and tobacco cessation. Education regarding and access to recommended screening such as colonoscopy and mammography are coordinated and managed. Preventive care in this relaxed yet comprehensive environment has the potential to improve poor health, reduce risky behavior and address social and other determinants of health, as well as assisting parents in early childhood development.

Traditional health care often presents numerous obstacles to continuity, access and convenience that impact the corporation. For example, clinic schedules require frequent attendance, a heavy cost in time, travel expenses and lost wages, which ultimately affect a patient's motivation to visit the provider. These obstacles to care have been carefully considered in the scheduling of office visits at RCW Primary Health. To increase access and ensure a timely visit, we have taken a revolutionary approach. Visits to the provider can be scheduled over extended hours during the week with shortened waiting times. All clinic appointments are at a minimum of 30 minutes for episodic and acute care, and one hour for an annual exam, allowing the extra time for provider-member interaction and health education.

Our alternative, convenience-focused approach to appointments is working—serving a population of approximately 800 employees, the clinic has seen an average of 92 visits and nearly 80 unique members each week since its opening in February 2012. The model facilitates the improvement of the health of employees and their families, without any detriment to the operation or efficiency of the company. One employee recalls a recent visit to the onsite clinic: "My child was sick. I called, got in. I would have had to have taken four hours, if not the whole day off from work to have my child seen elsewhere."

RCW has also engaged multiple corporate and community stakeholders in the implementation of this model. This includes previously underused communication technologies to ensure confidential exchange of health information to all local health providers that Riverside Center employees know and trust. Health care providers using electronic medical records over protected data lines, unaffiliated with LHI human capital, deliver effective and safe care with tools like the electronic medical record support prescribing systems and clinical decision aids. RCW and contracted providers are committed to developing new policies and communication methods.

Community partners from local health systems and hospitals participate in the corporate model as contracted service providers that may include the professional staffing of nurse practitioners, physician assistants, behavioral health specialists, dietitians, purchasing, and clinical operations. All providers must support the practice model, mission and vision, and wellness philosophy of RCW and LHI. Third party providers also participate in information and data tracking technologies and other services essential to the operations such as cleaning, facility maintenance and laboratory services. There are tangible benefits to both the service and practice model providers.

The most unique component of the RCW and LHI comprehensive approach that has significantly affected workplace culture is compensated wellness time. As a matter of policy, LHI employees may use up to three hours of paid time per week to utilize all sponsored wellness activities. These hours do not incur overtime, and may be used in the corporate fully staffed fitness facility and personal training, or group exercise. Members may also attend educational lunches, tobacco cessation services, mobile screenings such as mammography, and appointment times in the clinic for themselves or a child. Employees may also participate in a supervised walking program, and a more independent yet highly structured running club. Additional paid time is allowed for attendance at an annual Health Expo, flu shot, and biometric screening event, and various community activities that fall under corporate sponsorship in the realm of social wellness, such as blood drives. These activities are carefully monitored and audited to maintain compliance with workplace rules and ensure accountability, while meeting business needs. Every hour is carefully tracked and categorized, and usage statistics are carefully maintained and detailed in a dashboard, which maintains data regarding biometrics, paid time off usage, worker's compensation, family medical leave, health care costs, days of hospitalization, sick days and unplanned paid time off.

Bottom Line

Routine culture audits, self-health reports and personal health assessment data, along with detailed dashboard data, allow RCW to draw significant conclusions about the health and wellness initiatives. Trending indicates that employees have improved or greatly improved participation in physical activity and lipid and glucose levels have normalized or remained normal for a significant portion of the population. We have also seen impact on the overweight population with a decrease in BMI for those with BMI in the 26 to 30 range. In addition, tobacco use is decreasing. Perhaps the most important cultural indicator is that 98 percent of LHI employees feel that LHI emphasizes wellness, and 99 percent rate wellness programming as good to excellent, with a participation or activation rate of up to 80 percent.

CEO Don Weber is often quoted speaking eloquently about the cultural impact of wellness on not only the employee, but the family as well. "My dream is that every employee will be motivated by our corporate culture of wellness, and become a stronger and healthier part of the LHI family. In turn, I hope that our employees take that culture of wellness home with them at the end of the day and infuse it into their family lives. Healthy employees create healthier families, and ultimately, a healthier community for us all."

At RCW and LHI, we practice the 100/0 rule that Dr. John Izzo, a behavior change consultant, proposes as a business principle—and apply it to health and wellness—one hundred percent responsibility, zero excuses. Excuses to not participate in wellness or health promotion and disease prevention activity may be legitimate, but when an employee of LHI takes one hundred percent responsibility, excuses are no longer useful—and the cycle of inaction is broken. It is a very strong business concept that translates very well into wellness. The 100/0 rule can work to positively change everything—from health to personal relationships and business practices. RCW, LHI and Don Weber have taken responsibility for their employees at a level rarely seen in the corporate world and it has benefited employees, their family, the community and the bottom line.

The Y Collaborating for a Stronger, Healthier and Happier Coulee Region

By Bill Soper, YMCA CEO La Crosse Area Family YMCA

A stronger, healthier and happier Coulee Region starts with activities that keep residents active and engaged. We know that by removing barriers to unhealthy lifestyles, we can reduce conditions such as obesity and diabetes that are plaguing our neighbors and driving up the cost of health care. In addition, the epidemic of physical inactivity and poor nutrition leads to chronic health problems like heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer.

Our YMCA, through the Pioneering Healthier Communities (PHC) and many other initiatives is committed to improving the health and well-being of our community, both inside and outside the walls of the YMCA. We have been successful with our many community partners in combating the unhealthy lifestyles by implanting policies, projects and programs that make the healthy choice the easy choice where we live, learn, work and play.

In the fall of 2007 our YMCA was selected by the YMCA of the USA to be a PHC YMCA. PHC is a partnership between the YMCA of the USA, local Y's, local businesses, local government and local organizations and CDC. This work provided the opportunity to bring community leaders together so collaboratively we could improve the health and well being of our community. Our success with the PHC initiative provided the platform to launch many other community focused health and well-being efforts.

Where We Play

For years, YMCAs have focused on curbing physical inactivity. In fact, we've found that a love of play at any age can really improve the health and wellbeing of kids of all ages and, by extension, our county.

Three years ago we launched a program in partnership with YMCA of the USA called Press Play. Press Play is a free 8-week program designed to re-engage empty nester adults ages 45-60 in physical activity. Our Press Play opportunities have included basketball, dance, fitness classes, group exercise classes and nutrition.

Two years ago we brought the CDC-led National Diabetes Prevention Program to our community. The program helps those at high risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles by eating healthier, increasing physical activity and losing a modest amount of weight in order to reduce their chances of developing the disease. Since April 2011, 100 individuals have enrolled in the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program at the La Crosse Area Family YMCA.

At age 82, Dee Hutzler started exercising, lifting weights and changing her eating habits as part of the Diabetes Prevention Program. She joined the program when it was offered for the first time in April and lost 20 pounds during the first 16 weeks. She kept it off, even losing an additional five pounds during the maintenance period of the program. "I am a lot healthier, and I feel stronger," Dee says. "I move a lot better and I am making better choices when it comes to eating. I just didn't want to be diabetic, and when I heard about the program, I was really interested in it." Dee's story, as remarkable as it is, is a common occurrence among many participants of the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program since its launch in April, 2011.

In addition, we built community gardens adjacent to our Community Teen Center and the childcare center at our North YMCA. We host garden tours for other childcare centers to help bring gardens to the rest of the community. All of the produce from our Y North garden is incorporated into snacks or provided to Y members.

To reach younger populations, each year, through grant funding and a partnership with the Safe Kids coalition of the Coulee Region, the YMCA offers free swimming lessons. This year,

over 130 youth between the ages of 6-14 spent a week in YMCA pools learning how to swim and be safe in the water.

Where We Learn

Healthier children and adolescents make healthier adults. It's that simple. It's far easier to educate younger people on healthy choices than curb entrenched lifestyle decisions in middle-age. To ensure our children have the brightest future possible, we need to make sure they are as healthy as they can be.

One year ago we launched a partnership with the school district of Onalaska to manage their employee and student wellness programs. A "Community Wellness Director" spends half their time working with the district wellness team, the staff and the students within the district focused on improved well-being through behavior change. We have established a school garden at La Crosse's Franklin Elementary School. In addition, we have worked to incorporate farm-to-school curricula into the child care center and bring local fresh fruits and vegetables into school lunch menus.

We have also transformed menus throughout the Y to include fresh fruits and vegetables for all children. This includes menu changes in our full time childcare center, our school age programs, summer school programs and at our community teen center. In fact, all 900 enrolled school age child care receive a fresh fruit or vegetable daily.

To further educate children on the importance of a balanced diet, we are incorporating the 5210 curriculum into all Y youth programs: five fruits or vegetables daily, less than two hours of screen time, one hour of physical activity and zero sugary sweetened drinks daily. Slowly, we are seeing water become the drink of choice.

Where We Work

People spend a lot of time at work. Unfortunately most of that time is sitting or, if they are moving back and forth, it's usually to go to and from the vending machine. To truly affect a population change, we have to reach people where they are spending most of their time.

So, we partnered with a local vending company, Stansfield Vending, on Wellness Warriors, a program focused on increasing the amount of healthy food options in their vending machines. The healthy options are sold at a lower price point and the less healthy food items are at a higher price point. With the help of PHC, Wellness Warriors has been introduced to several local businesses. Additionally, Stansfield Vending launched another program countywide where for every piece of fresh fruit that is sold in their vending machines, they donate one piece of fresh fruit to the Ys School Age Child Care program.

Through our PHC partners (Gundersen Lutheran Health System & Mayo Health Systems), we created a Well Workplace Toolkit and recognition breakfast designed to encourage businesses to launch programs, policies and projects to support employee wellness within the workplace. We have also contracted with a large La Crosse employer, Inland Market and Labeling, to work with their wellness team to improve the well-being of their employees through behavior change efforts.

Where We Live

The majority of our programs and initiatives are created to make it easier for people to make the healthy choice where they live. We have gone beyond our community center and delivered produce to schools, healthy vending options to workplaces and physical activity options to neighborhoods.

Our PHC team recently brought together the leadership of local community gardens to have a conversation designed to bring efficiencies to the distribution of fruits and vegetables from these gardens. While we're in the early stages of this effort, ultimately it should improve access and distribution of fresh produce.

In addition, in partnership with local businesses and the County of La Crosse, we have installed nearly 60 bike racks in the La Crosse community. The bike racks are located primarily downtown and help encourage the community to ride to town on bikes, not in cars.

ENDNOTES

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