

# At A Glance 2015

## Workplace Health Promotion

Using the Workplace to Improve the Nation's Health



Workplace health promotion is a coordinated, planned, and organized set of programs, policies, benefits, and environmental supports designed to meet the health and safety needs of all employees. This comprehensive approach does the following:

- ◆ Puts strategies in place that address multiple risk factors and health conditions at the same time.
- ◆ Recognizes that the interventions and strategies chosen influence multiple levels of an organization, including individual employees and the overall organization or worksite.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is at the forefront of the nation's efforts to help employers build effective, science-based workplace health programs for their employees.

### Public Health Problem

The cost of insurance premiums and employee medical claims is at an all-time high and continues to rise. Business leaders are being called upon to make changes in the workplace to curb these rising costs.

### The Costs of Poor Health

- ◆ Four of the 10 most expensive health conditions for US employers—high blood pressure, heart attack, diabetes, and chest pain—are related to heart disease and stroke.
- ◆ Work-related stress is the leading workplace health problem and a major occupational health risk, ranking above physical inactivity and obesity.
- ◆ Productivity losses linked to employees who miss work cost employers \$225.8 billion, or \$1,685 per employee, each year.
- ◆ Full-time workers who are overweight or obese and have other chronic health problems miss about 450 million more days of work each year than healthy workers. The result is an estimated cost of more than \$153 billion in lost productivity each year.
- ◆ A 1% reduction in excess weight and high blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol levels has been shown to save \$83 to \$103 annually in medical costs per person.

### Fast Facts

- ◆ Chronic diseases and related lifestyle risk factors are the leading drivers of health care costs for employers.
- ◆ Programs that promote healthy workplaces can improve the lives of workers and lower costs for employers.
- ◆ CDC has developed tools that employers can use to assess their worksites and plan and evaluate workplace health programs.
- ◆ CDC offers model programs and training to help employers develop effective workplace health programs.



National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
Division of Population Health



## The Workplace: A Key Setting for Health Promotion

Workplace programs that promote and protect health and help prevent disease have the potential to reach more than 147 million workers across the United States. On average, Americans who work full-time spend more than one-third of their day, 5 days a week, at their workplace. Employers have a responsibility to provide a safe, hazard-free workplace for their employees. They also have an ideal setting for promoting individual health and fostering a healthy work environment.

Effective workplace programs and policies can reduce health risks and improve the quality of life for US workers. A healthier workforce can mean lower direct costs, such as insurance premiums and workers' compensation claims. It can also translate to lower indirect costs if workers miss less work because of illness and are more productive.

As more employers recognize these benefits, more are offering wellness programs to their employees. In 2014, 73% of small companies (with 3-199 employees) and 98% of large companies (with 200 or more employees) offered at least one wellness program as part of their health benefits. Examples include weight management or smoking cessation programs, lifestyle or health coaching, and health promotion resources.

## How Employers Can Promote Health in the Workplace

### Create a Culture of Health

Workplaces are well-defined communities that consist of people with a common purpose and culture. An effective workplace health program will require employers to

- ◆ Create a culture of health that is employee-centered.
- ◆ Provide supportive environments where safety is ensured and health can emerge.
- ◆ Increase access and opportunities for employees to participate in a variety of workplace health programs.

Building a culture of health involves all levels of an organization and establishes the workplace health program as a routine part of business operations that is aligned with overall business goals.

### Use Individual and Environmental Approaches

When employers think about ways to improve their employees' health, many think first about individual actions like quitting smoking or being more physically active. However, a broader perspective is needed—one that combines behavior-change programs for employees with strategies designed to influence the overall work environment. By changing workplace norms and adopting policies that are supportive of healthy behaviors, employers can reach more employees and make it easier for them to change their habits.

*Workplace health promotion programs are more likely to be successful if issues related to occupational safety and health are considered in their design and execution. A growing body of evidence indicates that workplace interventions that use coordinated, planned, or integrated approaches to reducing health threats to workers both on and off the worksite are more effective than individual programs.*



## CDC's Response

The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP) works in four key areas or domains: epidemiology and surveillance, environmental approaches, health care system interventions, and community programs linked to clinical services. This comprehensive approach supports healthy choices and behaviors, makes healthier options more available, and helps Americans better manage their health.

CDC works with employers and other partners to improve the health of workers and the organizations they work in by encouraging employers to use the strategies in CDC's [Workplace Health Model](#). With \$10 million in FY 2015 funding, CDC's Workplace Health Promotion Program supports these efforts by focusing its activities in two of NCCDPHP's four domains: epidemiology and surveillance and environmental approaches.

### Epidemiology and Surveillance

#### Collecting Data

CDC is developing a National Workplace Health Programs and Practices Survey to assess the organizational structure, characteristics, and practices of workplace health programs. This survey will collect data about health programs, policies, and benefits; environmental supports; leadership; infrastructure; and capacity. It will help establish surveillance and tracking systems that monitor employers' efforts and share information about the design, use, and evaluation of comprehensive workplace health programs.

The resulting data can be used to create guidelines, recommendations, and solutions to meet the needs of US employers. The data can also be used to evaluate national health priorities, such as Healthy People 2020 objectives for worksite health promotion programs.

CDC has also developed the CDC [Worksite Health ScoreCard](#) (HSC) to help employers assess their health promotion programs. Employers can use the HSC results to identify gaps in their programs and decide which strategies to use to promote health at their worksites. Examples of these strategies include leadership support; wellness champions and committees; tobacco control programs; occupational safety and health programs; and interventions designed to address nutrition, physical activity, stress management, depression, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

In 2012, the community partners of the Dartmouth College Prevention Research Center (PRC) began using the HSC in Cheshire County, New Hampshire. They provided technical assistance and local resources that aligned with each question on the HSC. Within a few months, the HSC had been used with five local employers, reaching more than 3,000 employees. The PRC then used each employer's results to help them create tailored action plans.

#### Identifying Best Practices

CDC supports research to learn what interventions and practices are most effective in helping employers improve the health and well-being of their workers (especially those who work for small and midsize employers).

*"All workplaces should provide opportunities for employees to improve their health and well-being. CDC provides science-based tools, strategies, and training to help employers develop effective workplace health programs to meet this goal."*

*Jason E. Lang, MPH, MS  
Director of CDC's Workplace Health Promotion Program*



In 2014, CDC created a Workplace Health Research Network through the PRC Program to

- ◆ Increase knowledge of the environmental, policy, system, and behavioral factors that contribute to individual health in the workplace.
- ◆ Identify, design, and test interventions that promote health at work.
- ◆ Translate this research into sustainable worksite programs in communities across the country.

## Environmental Approaches

### National Healthy Worksite Program

In 2011, CDC's National Healthy Worksite Program began helping small and midsize employers in eight communities across the United States develop comprehensive workplace health programs. Each employer received intensive support to help them implement a combination of program, policy, and environmental interventions to support physical activity, good nutrition, and tobacco-use cessation in the workplace. These interventions included stairwell enhancements, walking trails and walking clubs, flexible scheduling policies, worksite farmers' markets, healthy foods in cafeterias and vending machines, and tobacco-free worksite policies. Employers also received training, technical assistance, and mentoring through peer relationships.

A mix of qualitative and quantitative data will be collected to evaluate the program. The effectiveness of the interventions will be measured by their effect on employee health risks and behaviors, as well as by changes in employee productivity and organizational practice and culture. Evaluation results and lessons learned will be shared through reports, case studies, success stories, publications, and presentations to both employers and wellness professionals

### Work@Health Program

In 2014, CDC launched an employer training program called [Work@Health](#) to improve the organizational health of participating employers and to certify trainers who can help other employers set up workplace health programs. The program will help employers develop the skill set and capacity they need to build or enhance workplace health programs.

The program has supported more than 200 employers to participate through online, hands-on, or combined online and hands-on training. More than 100 additional participants (employers and other organizations that support workplace health efforts) also completed train-the-trainer sessions. Employers and other participants came from 42 states and US territories. Both groups also received technical assistance for 6 months after the formal training. Go to the CDC [Work@Health Program News](#) website to see the location of participants.

CDC plans to use the evaluation results of this program to better understand the training needs of employers and identify the best ways to deliver skill-based training to them.

## Future Directions

CDC will continue to expand partnerships to increase the adoption and sustainability of workplace health programs. We will continue to train and provide technical assistance to employers and partners to help them effectively plan, set up, and evaluate workplace health programs.

In addition, new activities focused on epidemiology, surveillance, and research will expand opportunities to understand and improve employee health and develop best practices for workplace health programs. The resulting information can then be used to develop new tools and resources and share them in worksites across the nation.



#### For more information, contact

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