



Wellness Programs: Checklist and Profiles

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Working toward Wellness: Creating Consumer-Friendly Workplace Wellness Programs

Wellness programs can be a powerful tool to help people improve their health and reduce their risk of developing chronic conditions. These programs aim to help people adopt healthy behaviors, like eating healthier, exercising regularly, or quitting smoking, by providing them with resources that support these behaviors. Common supports and activities that are offered through wellness programs include smoking cessation and weight management classes, organized group fitness activities, and courses on managing chronic diseases. By providing people with tools and resources that they might not otherwise have access to, these programs can help people adopt healthier lifestyles and support them through the process.

A growing number of employers are offering wellness programs to their workers. Workplace wellness programs have some unique benefits, since they take place in the environment where individuals already spend several hours each day. Implementing a workplace wellness program comes with some unique challenges that must be addressed in order to ensure that the program protects employees' rights and well-being.

The following checklist lays out the components for building a workplace wellness program that promotes health and well-being while also protecting participants' health coverage and privacy. It includes many actions that employers can take to boost their workers' health, as well as certain practices to avoid. An employer does not need to provide all of the activities and benefits listed in this checklist, but the more supports an employer can provide, the better. Starting on page 4, we feature five real workplace wellness programs from across the country that are using consumer-friendly methods to promote employees' health and well-being.

The Checklist

✓ Promote Voluntary Participation

Wellness programs should encourage people to participate by offering a range of activities that address different people's needs and limitations. For example, offering educational activities in addition to physical fitness activities can make a program inclusive of people with varied physical limitations. However, deciding whether to participate in a wellness program should be a personal choice that each employee will need to make based on his or her particular circumstances. Wellness programs should be designed to ensure that no one is penalized for choosing not to participate and that no one feels coerced into participating in a wellness program or activity.

✓ Offer Evidence-Based Supports and Activities

Wellness programs should employ tools and activities that have been shown to help people adopt and maintain healthy behaviors. For example, a program aimed at helping people quit smoking should strive to offer smoking cessation counseling and nicotine replacement therapy, which have been studied clinically and have been found to truly help people stop smoking. Ideally, wellness programs should offer these supports at no cost to individuals, but at the very least, the programs should be affordable so that all the people who need these resources can use them.

✓ Minimize Barriers to Participation

Designing wellness program offerings in ways that minimize participation barriers can help ensure that all individuals who want to take part in a program can actually do so. Programs should strive to offer wellness activities in the workplace itself during paid work hours to maximize participation. Otherwise, outside obligations, like a second job or family responsibilities, may prevent people from being able to participate in wellness programs.

✓ Establish Workplace Policies that Promote Health

A comprehensive workplace wellness program should ensure that workplace policies support healthy behaviors and foster a culture of health. For example, instituting flex-time scheduling can make it easier for employees to schedule necessary doctor appointments. Stocking workplace vending machines with healthy snacks and catering work events with healthy foods can support employees who are trying to improve their diets. Implementing these and other healthy workplace policies can make it easier for workers to achieve wellness goals.

✓ Provide Comprehensive Health Coverage with No Cost-Sharing for Wellness-Related Services

Being able to obtain the health care services people need to prevent illness and maintain their health is essential to achieving wellness goals. Therefore, having access

to comprehensive health coverage, particularly for services that relate to a wellness program's health goals, is an important factor in ensuring that a wellness program will be effective. Providing coverage for wellness services, such as smoking cessation classes or nutrition counseling, with no cost-sharing will help ensure that no one has to forgo these services due to cost.

✓ **Protect Access to Affordable Health Coverage and Care**

Some wellness programs may offer incentives to encourage participation in program activities. It's important that these wellness programs also protect access to the health care that people need to become and stay healthy. Therefore, wellness programs shouldn't use incentives that vary individuals' health insurance premiums, deductibles, or other cost-sharing based on whether they participate in a wellness activity or achieve a health outcome. These types of incentives can result in situations where the people who have the greatest health needs (for example, people with diabetes or high blood pressure) face the highest costs to get care, which may lead them to forgo necessary medical services due to the expense. Such an outcome contradicts the wellness program goal of helping people engage in behaviors that can improve their health. Therefore, if a wellness program chooses to use incentives to encourage participation, it should use small rewards like cash prizes, gift cards, or extra paid vacation days.

✓ **Protect the Privacy of Personal Health Information**

Some wellness programs ask employees to share personal health information in order to assess workers' health risks and plan relevant wellness activities. These programs need to have strong policies and procedures in place to protect the privacy of personal information, to ensure that employers never have access to individual-level health data, and to protect employees from discrimination based on their health information. Employers must also ensure that any efforts to collect workers' personal information comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) — two federal laws that include protections for workers' health information. One important way to minimize privacy violations is for wellness programs to always collect only the minimum amount of health data that is necessary to meet program goals.

✓ **Include Employee Feedback in Program Decision Making**

To maximize effectiveness, wellness programs should have a process for gathering feedback from employees and incorporating that feedback into future program decision making. Programs should gather feedback from program participants and from non-participants. Feedback from participants provides information on which aspects of the program are working and which are not. Feedback from non-participants provides equally valuable information on why some employees do not participate, which can be used to make the program more inclusive of these individuals and their needs.

Profiles of Consumer-Friendly Workplace Wellness Programs

Wellness programs are a relatively new way to promote health, and researchers are still figuring out what works best and what doesn't work in wellness programs. Still, many workplaces are developing creative and promising strategies to promote their employees' health. This group of case studies features five diverse workplaces, from small businesses to a large university, that are putting these principles into practice and finding promising and consumer-friendly ways to promote their employees' health and well-being.

Burien Wellness Works Burien, Washington

Employer Overview

Employer: City government

Number of employees: 63

Contact: Angie Chaufy, Human Resources Manager, angiec@burien.wa.gov

Wellness Program Overview

- Wellness Works is run by an employee-based wellness committee and one permanent human resources employee.
- The committee organizes educational seminars and webinars on a variety of health topics that workers can attend during the workday. Past topics include nutrition, diabetes care, and back care.
- Employees have the opportunity to participate in a variety of programs that focus on supporting healthy behavior changes. Past programs have focused on supporting physical activity, weight loss, and stress reduction. These programs last anywhere from six to 12 weeks.
- The committee encourages employees to participate in special events throughout the year, including national bike to work day and national wear red day for heart health awareness.
- The program intentionally offers a variety of activities that are inclusive of employees with different interests and physical abilities. They offer active weight loss and physical activity programs, alongside mental health and stress reduction activities and purely educational events.
- The committee designs activities based on annual employee survey results and the top three health risk factors of the employees, which are based on aggregate results of voluntary health risk assessments. Using aggregate data protects the privacy of personal health information.
- Currently, 96 percent of employees participate in the wellness program.
- Burien has received a Well City award from the Association of Washington Cities for the last four years.

Spotlight: Including Employees in Program Development

Burien's Wellness Works program recognizes that a wellness program is only as successful as the number of employees that choose to participate. Therefore, it incorporates employee feedback into its program planning through multiple strategies. The program is largely run by an employee-based wellness committee that is tasked with designing and promoting wellness activities. The committee includes employee representatives from every city department and all three city worksites. This structure enables the committee to design activities based on the needs and interests of a diverse employee population. The committee also conducts an annual employee survey on the wellness program and uses this feedback during its annual program planning. Employees can serve on the wellness committee for two-year terms and can hold no more than two consecutive terms on the committee. This built-in rotation of committee members is designed to give as many city employees as possible the opportunity to help develop program activities, which in turn increases their sense of ownership of and buy-in to the program.

Lake Stevens Employee Wellness Program Lake Stevens, Washington

Employer Overview

Employer: City government

Number of employees: 65

Contact: Steve Edin, Human Resources Director, sedin@lakestevens.wa.gov

Wellness Program Overview

- The Lake Stevens wellness program is run by an employee-based wellness committee that is made up of volunteer representatives from each city department.
- The program creates health campaigns that promote and support healthy behavior changes. Past campaigns have focused on diet, mental well-being, and stress reduction.
- The committee plans semi-annual awareness events where guest speakers do presentations on priority health topics, including stress management and physical activity.
- The committee supports all of the city departments' efforts to organize fitness activities that cater to their department's interests and schedules. For example, the police and fire department competed in a softball tournament against one another. Some departments have created lunchtime walking groups, and the police department has a bicycling group.

- The program holds annual health events, such as frisbee-golf tournaments and a healthy cook-off involving department directors.
- Employees can earn wellness points by participating in different program activities. They can use wellness points to “purchase” prizes (such as gift cards) at the city’s wellness store.
- The committee assesses annual program needs based on the aggregate results of voluntary health assessments and employee survey results, and it plans activities that address the top health risk factors in the employee population.
- Employee health insurance covers tobacco cessation services and health coaching.
- Lake Stevens earned a Well City Award from the Association of Washington Cities and was recognized as a leader in employee wellness by the Partnership for Prevention.

Spotlight: Creating an “Infrastructure of Wellness”

In addition to planning regular health and wellness activities for employees, Lake Stevens aims to support physical activity and wellness throughout the work day. To create an “infrastructure of wellness” within the work environment, the wellness committee equipped the office lunch rooms with a hula hoop, ball, and frisbee. City employees are encouraged to take breaks and use this recreational equipment during their work day.

Passport to Wellness Employee Wellness Program Reston Association, Reston, Virginia

Employer Overview

Employer: Community association

Number of employees: 82

Contact: Alice Page, Director of Human Resources, alicep@reston.org

Wellness Program Overview

- “Passport to Wellness” focuses on health education and awareness and aims to promote physical, emotional, and financial well-being.
- It partnered with a local hospital association to offer voluntary biometric screenings, like blood pressure screenings, to employees. Aggregate results of these screenings, which protected the privacy of individuals’ information, were used to plan wellness activities that addressed the employee group’s top health risk factors.

- The program leverages community resources to plan brown bag lunch seminars with local guest speakers at least once a month. Past topics have included heart health, caring for oneself when caring for others, eating healthy on the go, reducing stress, and planning for retirement.
- It branded the wellness program as “Passport to Wellness.” Employees who attend brown bags and participate in other organized wellness activities, like walking/biking to work contests, can earn wellness points or “passport stamps” toward prizes like gift cards and the chance to win an extra paid vacation day at the end of the year. People can earn wellness points through activities they do on their own as well, like donating blood, getting a physical, or exercising at a gym.
- Reston Association’s main office has an onsite gym for employees.
- The program regularly requests employee feedback through wellness emails and surveys.
- The program was named greater Washington, D.C.’s #1 Healthiest Employer with no more than 99 employees by *Washington Business Journal* in 2011.

Spotlight: Engaging a Diverse Workforce

Reston Association employs a diverse workforce that is spread across three worksites, including landscapers, groundskeepers, and maintenance workers. Engaging the maintenance staff, which is predominantly male, has been more challenging, especially as they often are not at the association’s main office. To reach out to these employees, Reston Association held a special brown bag seminar for maintenance employees at the maintenance facility. Because the maintenance employees typically have physically demanding duties, Reston Association invited a local physical therapist to come and discuss ways employees could stay healthy and strong. More than 50 percent of the maintenance staff attended, and the seminar received positive feedback, with employees requesting future brown bags at the maintenance facility. The program intends to organize future brown bags for maintenance staff based on maintenance employees’ interests and suggested topics.



Fit for Life Wellness Program Maple Grove, Minnesota

Employer Overview:

Employer: City government

Number of employees: 245

Contact: Claudia Schmoyer, Wellness Program Chair and Human Resources Coordinator, cschmoyer@maplegrovernj.gov

Wellness Program Overview

- “Fit for Life” is run by an employee-based wellness committee that is composed of volunteer representatives from each city department, as well as two human resource staff members. Having representatives from each department enables the committee to design activities that are tailored to the different departments’ needs and interests.
- The wellness committee plans activities that address the top five health risk factors in the employee population, which are based on aggregate results of voluntary health risk assessments. Using only aggregate results protects the privacy of individual-level data.
- To address the issues of physical activity and nutrition, the committee has planned activities like healthy recipe contests, 12-week nutrition courses, and group trainings for a 5K race.
- The city also offers onsite group health coaching workshops to employees on a range of health topics.
- The committee plans regular health seminars and makes it easier for employees to participate by holding the seminars during the work day and by allowing employees to take paid time to attend them.
- The program designed special wellness activities for the police department that accommodate their nontraditional work schedules.
- Employees who participate in organized wellness activities can earn wellness points toward up to two additional paid vacation days.
- In addition, employees are allowed to design their own wellness activities to fit their interests and schedules, which can also be approved for wellness points.

Spotlight: Seeing Measurable Results

Maple Grove uses a variety of measures to evaluate its wellness program. To evaluate the program's year-to-year success, it consistently tracks participation in wellness activities and implements annual employee surveys. Today, about 60 percent of employees participate in the program. Its annual employee survey found that the program had a positive impact on employees' health, increased their awareness of their personal risky health behaviors, and taught them how to address those behaviors. Because the city's wellness program has been in place for many years, it is now able to measure the long-term financial benefits of the program too: The city found that it has lower annual health care costs than the local average and that the return on its investment was \$6 in health premium savings for every \$1 it spent on the wellness program. The city has also seen a 20 percent reduction in its worker compensation claims.

UI LiveWell Program University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Employer Overview

Employer: State university

Number of employees: 15,000

Contact: Joan Troester, Director of Human Resources Services, Joni-troester@uiowa.edu

Wellness Program Overview

- Livewell is managed by UI's human resources department. To more fully engage employees, LiveWell created the Volunteer Wellness Ambassador Program. These employee ambassadors act as liaisons between their university department and the LiveWell program. The program currently has 90 volunteer employee Wellness Ambassadors.
- LiveWell offers multiple wellness seminars that are designed to support people who are trying to make or maintain healthy changes in their lifestyle. Past topics include healthy meal planning, stress management strategies, and how to read food labels.
- LiveWell also offers an in-house health coaching program to all employees. Employees can get in-person coaching at multiple university locations, and they can also get coaching over the phone.
- Health coaches protect the privacy of participants' personal health information and do not share any information with either insurers or employers.

- Employees who use UI’s fitness facilities at least four times per month and who complete an annual online health assessment can receive a 50 percent discount on their monthly fitness facility membership fee.
- To foster a healthy work environment, UI is now a smoke-free campus, and the university began offering more fruits and healthy foods on campus.
- UI offers “Weight-Watchers at Work” to employees at three campus worksites.
- LiveWell uses employee satisfaction survey results, participation data, aggregate claims data, and aggregate results of voluntary health assessments to evaluate its program and to plan future program activities and goals.

Spotlight: Designing Consumer-Friendly Incentives

The LiveWell program designed the Well on Our Way (WOOW) incentive program to support and reward employees for making healthy behavior changes or maintaining healthy behaviors. Through the WOOW program, employees can earn wellness points for engaging in healthy behaviors like exercising for 30 minutes a day, eating five servings of fruits or vegetables a day, or practicing a stress management technique throughout the day. Employees self report these activities and track their wellness points online at their personal WOOW page. Employees can then use earned wellness points to “purchase” prizes at the UI wellness store. These prizes include university apparel, fitness equipment, and other small items. The higher the value of the prize, the more it costs in wellness points. This incentive design motivates employees to reach their wellness goals and to obtain larger prizes.

Acknowledgments

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