

# Current Practices in Worksite Wellness Initiatives



National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, & Obesity





## Overview

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supports efforts nationwide to reduce the risk factors associated with childhood and adult obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke through its State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health (State Public Health Actions) program. Through a federal grant, all 50 states and the District of Columbia receive funds to help prevent these chronic diseases.

This program focuses on healthy environments in workplaces, schools, early childhood education facilities, and the community. It also focuses on working through health systems and communities to reduce complications from multiple chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. The goal is to make healthy living easier for all Americans.

Grantees of the State Public Health Actions program serve on the front lines of public health prevention efforts, exploring and testing new and innovative approaches that can provide critical insight and lessons learned to others. The goal of this document is to summarize and share information on current approaches to help other grantees working in these same areas. This document highlights efforts by six state health departments to create healthier community environments through worksite wellness initiatives.

## Current Practices in Worksite Wellness Initiatives

Worksite wellness programs can simultaneously improve the health of employees while also reducing health care costs for employers and improving worker productivity.<sup>1</sup> Workplace wellness initiatives can include programs, policies, benefits, environmental supports, and community links that promote the health and safety of all employees. Maintaining a healthy workforce can lower direct costs, such as insurance premiums and worker compensation claims, and have a positive effect on many indirect costs, such as absenteeism and worker productivity.<sup>2-5</sup> Worksite wellness programs can make it easier for employees to make voluntary behavior changes that improve their health.

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## Making it Work: Breastfeeding-Friendly Worksites in Arizona

The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) developed the Making it Work program, which helps employers and employees create breastfeeding-friendly worksites. The program builds on the Healthy Arizona Worksites Program (HAWP), which was developed by ADHS and the Maricopa County Department of Public Health. HAWP is a healthy nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco control program funded by tobacco tax revenue that is designed to help employers set up worksite wellness programs.

The Making it Work program uses an online tool kit modeled after the federal Health Resources and Services Administration's Business Case for Breastfeeding. The tool kit contains guidance and support tools to help employers set up breastfeeding-friendly worksites. All materials are available on one website to help ensure consistent messaging.

The Making it Work website provides information for many different audiences, including businesses, hospitals, child care centers, insurance companies, and staff from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Businesses can request a copy of the Making it Work tool kit online. Within 1 week, the program coordinator will contact them to offer TA on how to use the tool kit.

### Lessons Learned

The ADHS identified two lessons learned that public health practitioners may consider when they seek to put similar initiatives into place:

- ◆ **Partnerships support recruitment of new businesses into the program.** Key partners, such as the Arizona Small Business Association, reach out to their member organizations and partners to increase the visibility of HAWP and Making it Work. ADHS also asks local breastfeeding coordinators from WIC to help identify and recruit local businesses.
- ◆ **State policies have helped expand the reach of the program.** Licensed child care centers in Arizona may receive reductions in their licensing fees if they follow certain healthy worksite guidelines, such as making their centers breastfeeding-friendly. ADHS made child care centers a priority when they launched the Making it Work program.

### Role of the State Health Department

**Developer:** ADHS staff developed the Making it Work program, which includes a website and online tool kit.

#### Training and Technical Assistance

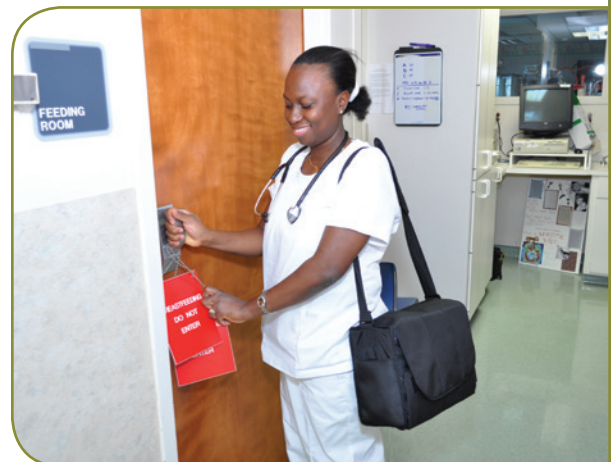
**Provider:** The program coordinator contacts businesses in Arizona after they receive the tool kit to provide technical assistance (TA) on how to use it.

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## Arkansas Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program

In 2005, the Arkansas state legislature passed legislation that allowed employees of state agencies to earn up to 3 days of paid leave annually to participate in free worksite wellness programs. The Arkansas Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program (AHELP) was created as part of this legislation. AHELP is a worksite wellness program available to all state agencies, boards, and commissions in Arkansas. It can be adapted to meet the needs of the 35 state agencies (about 500 worksites and 13,000 full-time state employees) that it covers. Participation in AHELP is at the discretion of each agency's director.

ADH uses CDC's Work@Health curriculum to provide training, TA, and education to worksites. Work@Health is an employer-based training program that establishes, expands, and improves science- and practice-based health promotion strategies that can lead to specific and measureable means of reducing chronic disease rates in the workplace. ADH, in collaboration with members of the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention, teaches the eight-module Work@Health curriculum and hosts quarterly 2-hour conference calls with all AHELP participants. Before participating in AHELP, state agencies and businesses must complete a CDC Worksite Health Scorecard.

In 2007, ADH created a Web-based tracking system that allows employees of state agencies participating in AHELP to enter and track behavior change related to healthy eating and active living. It also allows ADH to track participation across state agencies. ADH also set up a new mobile application for AHELP participants that includes the CDC Worksite Health Scorecard.

### Lessons Learned

ADH identified several lessons learned that public health practitioners may consider when they seek to put similar initiatives into place:

- ◆ **The Web-based tracking system is key to the success of AHELP.** Coupled with the CDC Worksite Health Scorecard, the tracking system allows the health department to assess employee wellness needs and gaps to help create tailored programs and provide relevant TA for each worksite.
- ◆ **Agency and business leadership must be on board.** ADH has found that without buy-in at the leadership level, employee lifestyle programs cannot succeed. When employees across the state reach out to the ADH for information about AHELP, the department will typically send a Director's Packet of information to the employee's leadership to introduce them to the program.

### Role of the State Health Department

#### Training and Technical Assistance

**Provider:** ADH uses CDC's Work@Health curriculum to provide training and TA to local health educators in the state's five health regions.

**Funder:** CDC's State Public Health Actions program provides a portion of the funds needed to meet the program's objectives. Through a Memorandum of Agreement, the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention uses these funds for TA, training, and seed money to help worksites make policy, system, and environmental changes.

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- ◆ **Following a standard protocol ensures a strong foundation.** Plans must be in place for conducting assessments and identifying gaps. By following a standard process of assessing each agency or business with the CDC Worksite Health Scorecard, introducing leadership to the program, and providing initial guidance, ADH ensures a strong foundation for worksite wellness initiatives. This process also ensures that agencies and businesses are ready to participate in a worksite wellness program.
- ◆ **Implementing a formal policy within state agencies is challenging.** Directors of state agencies will generally support having a formal agreement with ADH and will send an agency wide e-mail describing their participation in AHELP. However, getting agencies to write formal nutrition or physical activity content into their policies and procedures has been difficult.



## Choose Healthy Now! Healthy Vending in Hawaii

The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) partnered with the Department of Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ho'opono Services for the Blind to launch the Choose Healthy Now! Healthy Vending Project to increase healthy food and beverage offerings. Six vendors operating snack bars or cafeterias in state and federal buildings participated in the pilot project from May to September 2014, with 6 additional vendors joining the project during 2015 and 9 more scheduled for 2016.

Choose Healthy Now! helps employees make healthier decisions by using colored, point-of-decision stickers. Green stickers indicate the healthiest choices ("Go!"), yellow stickers indicate in-between choices ("Slow"), and red stickers indicate the least healthy choices ("Uh-oh"). The program also created other materials, like signs, posters, table tents, newsletters, and e-mails, to help employees make healthy decisions, explain the meaning of the colored stickers, and promote items in workplace snack shops and cafeterias.

Program staff used findings from an employee survey and a baseline inventory of vendors' offerings to develop Choose Healthy Now! Three-quarters of survey respondents said it was important to have healthy snacks available in their worksite snack shops and that they were willing to buy those items.<sup>6</sup> The inventory also showed that most employees (72%) visited their snack shops to buy "red" items. Participating vendors have increased the percentage of "green" items they offer by 98% and the percentage of "yellow" items by 14%.

Hawaii DOH staff conducted focus groups to get employee feedback on the program's materials and then modified the materials to make them more appealing. Staff also used lessons learned from the pilot project to develop a free online toolkit that includes marketing materials, and simplified criteria for rating foods and beverages for public and private worksites. Further evaluation and recruitment of additional businesses to participate in the program is ongoing.

### Lessons Learned

The Hawaii DOH identified several lessons learned that public health practitioners may consider when they seek to put similar initiatives into place:

- ◆ **Having a public champion is important.** On July 22, 2015, First Lady of Hawaii, Dawn Amano-Ige, recognized snack shop and cafeteria vendors participating in the Choose Healthy Now! Project. Vendors received Vending Champion Awards for being among the first to participate in the project. In 2015, Mrs. Amano-Ige also honored Castle Medical Center as the first hospital, and Aloha Petroleum as the first retail business in Hawaii to adopt Choose Healthy Now! Her championing of this project increases its potential reach, credibility, and visibility throughout the state.
- ◆ **Building relationships is key to promoting worksite wellness initiatives.** Hawaii DOH staff promoted the Choose Healthy Now! Project by presenting at a meeting of the Hawaii Health at Work Alliance, a group that includes over 200 Hawaii private employers. Hawaii DOH staff also found that collaborating with other government agencies and with divisions within the health department can lead to supportive partnerships that can be used to expand worksite wellness programs. The partnership developed with Ho'opono Services for the Blind has helped the health department recruit more vendors to participate in Choose Healthy Now! and reach more worksites.

### Role of State Health Department

**Developer:** A Hawaii DOH registered dietitian used national guidelines to develop the nutrition-based rating system that is the core of Choose Healthy Now! The program continues to identify and increase the number of healthy offerings at participating worksites and to recruit additional Ho'opono vendors.

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- ◆ **The color options for stickers are meaningful.** Through the pilot project, DOH staff found that vendors do not want to discourage people from buying what have historically been the vendors' best-selling "red" items. Initially, vendors only displayed green and yellow stickers to denote their healthier items. But customers thought the yellow stickers represented unhealthy items, and this misunderstanding led fewer people to choose these items. It was decided to discontinue the use of the yellow stickers unless the red stickers are also used. Through other partnerships, it became clear that some partners such as hospitals prefer to use all three colors for educational purposes, while other partners such as retail food outlets prefer to use green-only promotion of healthier items. As Choose Healthy Now! continues in blind vendors' snack shops, most will use the green-only option as the point-of-decision prompt, along with increasing the number of healthy offerings and utilizing product placement strategies to promote the healthier options.



## Healthiest Maryland Businesses Program

Healthiest Maryland Businesses (HMB) is the state's initiative to support healthy workplaces. As of April, 2016, a total of 457 businesses with 341,022 employees were participating. A statewide HMB coordinator working in the state's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene provides comprehensive guidance and support to six regional coordinators. These regional coordinators work directly with participating businesses to use the CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard as an annual self-assessment and planning tool.

The regional coordinators also support worksite health promotion programs by providing TA to help employers implement nutrition standards and policies that support daily physical activity, hosting regional training events, and maintaining communication networks to share best practices.

The reach of these programs is monitored through monthly reports submitted to the state health department, which tracks the number of worksites that develop or adopt healthy food service guidelines (including sodium standards) and monitors the training and TA provided to employers.

HMB works with state partners to expand the menu of tools and resources the regional coordinators offer to businesses and to monitor their usage. The HMB statewide coordinator also worked with a health department staff member who is also a WIC breastfeeding coordinator to provide training on the Health Resources and Services Administration's Business Case for Breastfeeding. After the training, a small grants program was set up to help businesses develop worksite lactation support policies and dedicated lactation rooms. As a result, nine businesses with 4,114 employees have improved their worksite lactation support.

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health evaluates HMB's physical activity policies and walking promotion best practices as part of its participation in the Physical Activity Policy Research Network+ project. Project staff are currently analyzing HSC data and additional physical activity promotion evaluation questions. Findings will be used to monitor progress and share best practices.

### Role of the State Health Department

**Coordinator:** The state HMB coordinator ensures a uniform approach to outreach and assistance to businesses, sets procedural standards for the regional coordinators, resolves operational issues, and provides a forum for regional coordinators to share feedback and experiences.

**Training and Technical Assistance Provider:** The state HMB coordinator identifies training opportunities to enhance the ability of the six regional coordinators to help worksites set up wellness programs and to give them training and TA.

**Funder:** HMB provides funding and support to regional coordinators and businesses to make policy and environmental changes to support employee health.





## Lessons Learned

The Maryland Department of Mental Health and Hygiene identified several lessons learned that public health practitioners may consider when they seek to put similar initiatives into place:

- ◆ **Helping businesses complete the CDC Worksite Health Scorecard increases enrollment.** Businesses may find it difficult to complete the scorecard because of its length and complexity. To overcome this challenge, regional coordinators provide TA to businesses to help them complete the assessment.
- ◆ **Training from the National Wellness Institute and CDC's Work@Health Program has enhanced the skills of program coordinators.** The statewide coordinator and the regional coordinators are all certified as worksite wellness specialists through the National Wellness Institute (NWI). The NWI promotes optimal health and wellness in individuals and communities. One regional coordinator is also a CDC Work@Health certified trainer and a TA provider and has provided comprehensive Work@Health training to employers throughout Maryland. Work@Health is an employer-based training program that establishes, expands, and improves science and practice-based health promotion strategies that can lead to specific and measureable means of reducing chronic disease rates in the workplace.
- ◆ **HMB's regional coordinator model contributes to the program's success.** The regional coordinators' connection to and knowledge of their communities makes it easier to achieve buy-in from employers. This approach also takes into account the state's regional diversity. Business density and cultures vary greatly across Maryland's six regions, and what works in one community may not work in another. The health department encourages coordinators to plan educational events and worksite wellness forums in a way that makes the most sense for each community.

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## Mississippi Worksite Wellness Champion Model

In 2010, Mississippi passed legislation that called for the identification of a wellness champion and wellness council at each state agency. The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) provides trainings to the wellness champions to help them put worksite wellness initiatives into place. The department provides TA through onsite visits and four annual in-person trainings.

MSDH uses the CDC Worksite Health Scorecard to assess and score worksite health practices at state agencies. MSDH also uses the national FitPick healthy vending and micro market labeling program to train and provide TA to wellness champions at state agencies. The FitPick program helps worksites identify and provide products that meet recognized nutrition standards in vending machines.

In addition to providing guidance on healthy food options for employees, MSDH also helps state agencies develop lactation programs that allow breastfeeding employees to express milk during work hours. Employers receive education on the benefits of creating a supportive breastfeeding environment and implementing supportive policies.

MSDH's worksite wellness team also wrote a policy on healthy catering in the workplace. The policy went into effect on July 1, 2015 and applies to MSDH meetings and sponsored events. MSDH's Office of Preventive Health will offer learning sessions to teach midlevel managers and administrative staff how to comply with the policy.

Mississippi also has a program called Motivating Mississippi: Keys to Living Healthy, which uses wellness coaches to provide a variety of resources and learning opportunities (e.g., online coaching, weight management programs, onsite wellness coaching) to agencies across the state. MSDH works with the program to provide four annual trainings to state agency wellness champions and at various employee wellness events, such as Shape Up at the Capitol and State Employee Day at the Farmers' Market. The program is provided by ActiveHealth Management, which is administered by Mississippi's State and School Employees' Health Insurance Plan.

MSDH also works with the Mississippi Business Group on Health (MSBGH) and the Mississippi Business Journal (MSBJ) to support the Mississippi Worksite Wellness Recognition Program. This program recognizes the state's healthiest workplaces in the public sector, private sector, and allied businesses, such as nonprofits.

### Role of the State Health Department

**Developer:** MSDH's worksite wellness team wrote a policy for healthy catering and provides training and TA to support compliance.

**Training and Technical Assistance Provider:** MSDH provides onsite TA and in-person trainings to wellness champions at all state agencies.





## Lessons Learned

MSDH identified several lessons learned that public health practitioners may consider when they seek to put similar initiatives into place:

- ◆ **State policies help pave the way.** In addition to identifying a wellness champion and wellness council at each state agency, MSDH created a statewide wellness director position. MSDH also helps agencies comply with the state's worksite wellness policies, such as the healthy catering policy.
- ◆ **MSDH's partnerships help expand the reach of worksite wellness initiatives.** The MSDH's partnership with MSBGH and MSBJ allows it to reach beyond state agencies and into the private sector to provide resources and tool kits. Its partnership with the Motivating Mississippi program involves many state vendors, including Blue Cross Blue Shield, ActiveHealth Management, and Prime Therapeutics (which manages the state's pharmacy plan). MSDH also partners with the Mississippi Blind Vendors Association to provide TA and training on healthy vending strategies and the FitPick program.
- ◆ **Cross sector collaboration for policy development and adoption takes time.** The MSDH worksite wellness team spent a lot of time and energy writing the healthy catering policy and working with leaders within the agency to get approval for the policy. The state has more than 100 organizational units across its state agencies, which makes the team's work challenging. Despite this challenge, policy efforts are often more sustainable because they create lasting change.
- ◆ **Lack of organizational support at midmanager levels can hinder adoption of worksite wellness initiatives.** MSDH found that new programs may never take hold without midlevel manager support and engagement, and convincing midlevel managers of the importance of worksite wellness initiatives can be a challenge. In addition, some wellness champions are more engaged than others, and high rates of turnover can make it hard for new worksite wellness policies to be successfully adopted.

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## Montana Comprehensive Worksite Wellness

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (MTDPHHS) operates a comprehensive worksite wellness initiative through 13 regional contractors in local health departments. The infrastructure for this initiative was created by the Montana Cancer Control Program (MCCP). The MCCP work involves tobacco control and chronic disease prevention wellness initiatives in public and private worksites throughout the state.

Through its collaboration with MCCP and the regional contractors, MTDPHHS uses a coordinated approach to meet collective goals around worksite wellness across chronic disease programs.

The regional contractors recruit at least three new worksites every year to adopt new worksite wellness policies. The contractors work with each enrolled worksite for 2 to 3 years on policy, system, and environmental changes to help the worksites meet their worksite wellness goals. The contractors sometimes conduct a survey of the worksite's culture of health (developed through a partnership with the University of Michigan) to assess employee needs. The results are used to put policies into place to meet those needs over the next year.

MTDPHHS uses a contractor certified in worksite wellness to conduct monthly webinars to provide training and TA to its regional contractors. These trainings include the Wellness Council of America's (WELCOA's) seven benchmarks of results-oriented workplace wellness programs. Regional contractors can also buy WELCOA memberships, which give them access to more worksite wellness resources, tools, and trainings. In addition, MTDPHHS provides in-person training for the contractors twice a year.

MTDPHHS also has a breastfeeding consultant who works with the Montana State Breastfeeding Coalition to provide additional training and TA to regional contractors who are working on breastfeeding-friendly worksite initiatives. In addition, MTDPHHS partners with the Montana Worksite Health Promotion Coalition and the Montana Association of Health Care Purchasers to support an annual conference for employers to share success stories, lessons learned, and helpful resources.

### Lessons Learned

MTDPHHS identified several lessons learned that public health practitioners may consider when they seek to put similar initiatives into place:

- ◆ **Monthly webinars allow regional contractors to share successes.** Monthly training and TA by a wellness champion provide opportunities for regional contractors to share success stories, resources, and advice about how to overcome challenges.
- ◆ **Smaller worksites may lack the infrastructure to put wellness initiatives into place.** Small worksites may not have the staff, time, or space to set up worksite wellness initiatives. Despite this challenge, MTDPHHS staff find it helpful when these organizations share their stories and provide advice for other small worksites.
- ◆ **Feedback from worksites is invaluable.** Participating worksites are encouraged to provide MTDPHHS and the regional contractors with feedback to help improve the state's worksite wellness efforts. MTDPHHS staff take the feedback seriously and work to use it to improve future initiatives.

### Role of State Health Department

**Funder:** MTDPHHS funds contracts with 13 regional coordinators at local health departments.

**Technical Assistance Provider:** MTDPHHS provides monthly training opportunities for regional contractors who work with worksites to help them adopt wellness policies that support healthy lifestyles for their employees. The department also tracks and evaluates the worksites' progress.

**Developer:** MTDPHHS developed model policies for tobacco, nutrition, breastfeeding, and physical activity. Worksites can adopt and tailor these policies to best suit their needs.

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## Resources and References

### Resources for More Information

CDC website: [Worksite Health Scorecard](#)

State of Hawaii Department of Health website: [Choose Healthy Now! Healthy Vending Project](#)

Arizona Department of Health Services, [Breastfeeding Program website](#).

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