

Texas Implements Point-of-Decision Stairwell Prompts to Increase Employee Physical Activity

“If you know there’s limited funding, specific interventions—like stairwell or other infrastructure changes that don’t require a lot of maintenance, updates, or changes—might be very good first steps.”

—Liza Creel, Director, Texas Health Institute

The obesity rate among adults in Texas has increased at an alarming pace. According to a [2012 report](#) from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America’s Health, the state’s adult obesity rate increased from 16 percent in 1995 to 30 percent in 2011. As the state’s proportion of overweight and obese adults has grown, so too have related disease rates and healthcare costs. At the current pace, more than 57 percent of adults in Texas are expected to be obese by 2030, according to the report—resulting in a 17 percent increase in obesity-related healthcare costs.

Recognizing an opportunity to promote awareness and adoption of evidence-based workplace wellness interventions, a team representing the state’s health agency, the Texas Health Institute, the Texas Medical Association, and a legislative committee convened in 2012 to implement evidence-based strategies using two recommendations found in the Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide): worksite programs to prevent and control obesity, and point-of-decision prompts to encourage use of stairs, described below.

- Based on strong evidence of effectiveness for reducing weight among employees, the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recommends worksite programs aimed at improving diet and/or physical activity behaviors. These programs can include one or more approaches to support behavioral change including informational and educational, behavioral and social, and policy and environmental strategies.
- Based on strong evidence for moderately increasing physical activity levels, the Task Force recommends point-of-decision prompts to encourage use of stairs. Prompts are motivational signs placed in or near stairwells or at the base of elevators and escalators to encourage individuals to increase stair use.

As one of four teams participating in the 2012 Community Guide Strategy Workshop—hosted by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and the National Network of Public Health Institutes—the Texas state team adopted a strategy to increase physical activity in state agencies and assess the policy and environmental factors that facilitate or impede healthy workplaces. This case study highlights their evidence-based approach for increasing physical activity in worksites and addressing the policy and environmental factors that contribute to adult obesity.

“What Is The Community Guide?”

The Community Guide is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. The Community Guide provides evidence-based recommendations about public health programs, services, and policies that are effective in improving health. The recommendations are made by the Community Preventive Services Task Force, an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel of public health and prevention experts who are appointed by the director CDC.

Increasing Employee Use of Stairs

To increase physical activity among state employees, the team implemented the Community Preventive Services Task Force’s recommendation to install point-of-decision prompts to encourage employee use of stairs. Based on CDC’s StairWELL intervention, which combined motivational signs and stairwell enhancements (e.g., music, carpet, and artwork), the team made plans to install signs and improve the appearance of stairwells in multiple-story state agency buildings. The team collaborated with the Texas Facilities Commission to gather feedback on the proposed signs and obtain approval for new signs and stairwell enhancements.

With approval from the Texas Facilities Commission, the team created, printed, and posted new point-of-decision prompts and installed infrared sensors to gather pre- and post-intervention data on employee use of stairwells. Stairwell improvements, including signs and infrared sensors, were installed in DSHS buildings as a pilot to determine costs, barriers and opportunities. The team used the stairwell monitors to collect baseline data on DSHS employee use of stairwells.

Post-intervention results on stairwell use are not yet available; however, Texas Health Institute Director Liza Creel says that the modest investment of time and resources will result in long-term employee wellness benefits. Also, the infrared monitors can provide ongoing data related to the long-term effects of the stairwell intervention. “Through The Community Guide our team was

Texas Team Highlights

Project Goal: To improve the overall health of state agency employees by: 1) increasing state employee use of stairwells and 2) assessing barriers to state employee participation in worksite wellness programs.

Selected Community Guide

Interventions: [Obesity Prevention and Control: Worksite Programs](#) and [Point-of-Decision Prompts to Encourage Use of Stairs](#).

Partners: The Texas state team included representatives from the Department of State Health Services, Texas Medical Association, Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, and the Texas Health Institute. The team coordinated efforts with the state agency wellness liaisons, the state worksite wellness coordinator, the Texas Facilities Commission, the Employees Retirement System of Texas, and state agencies that participated in an online survey.

able to identify effective methods to address employee wellness that were practical to implement, were replicative, and had the potential to impact a large number of employees,” says DSHS Deputy Commissioner Luanne Southern. The team’s work products—including signs and sample materials—provide useful tools for other agencies and employers that want to implement a stairwell initiative. Links to these products are included as resources at the end of this case study.

Assessing and Addressing Barriers to Use of Worksite Wellness Resources

In addition to the stairwell initiative, the team also wanted to gather information on current worksite wellness policies and services, as well as employee awareness and use of existing wellness programs. The team met with the DSHS wellness liaison and staff from the Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) to identify state wellness programs, as well as current and potential opportunities for coordination between ERS wellness programs and DSHS-specific initiatives.

The team designed an online survey to assess state employee knowledge and use of existing services (e.g., nurse hotline, weight loss program), as well as underlying barriers that prevent employees from utilizing services. “We wanted to understand the employee perspective on wellness within the place where they worked,” Creel says. In addition, the survey results would suggest opportunities for enhanced marketing of existing resources and changes to the current state employee benefits and wellness resources. “We saw it as an opportunity to learn,” Creel says.

The team coordinated with the state worksite wellness coordinator to create and distribute the survey to employees in three state agencies: the Office of the Comptroller of Public Accounts, the General Land Office, and the Texas Water Development Board. The surveys asked employees to identify barriers that prevent them from participating in available programs, as well as incentives that would motivate them to participate. Of the 3,779 employees who received an online survey, the team received complete responses from 892 employees.

Among other findings, the survey revealed that 19 percent of respondents were not aware that the state employee health plan provided wellness benefits and just eight percent of respondents had used the weight loss program. Sixty percent of respondents reported that they rarely or never take the stairs. Employees suggested marketing to help increase awareness of available wellness programs, including emails, reminders, and enhanced wellness web presence and signage. Creel says that the survey findings are expected to inform discussions about wellness benefits offered by the state’s health insurer.

Challenges, Lessons, and Opportunities

The stairwell intervention required changes to state buildings, which not only takes time but demands a high level of stakeholder engagement. As a result, engaging with partners—including wellness liaisons, staff from the Texas Facilities Commission and Employees Retirement System of Texas—early on and throughout the installation phase was a key implementation strategy. Because elevators and stairwells

are configured differently across office buildings, the team worked with a single point of contact from each building to identify specific sign needs.

Likewise, administering multi-agency surveys requires a high level of coordination and communication among team members and participating agencies. “Coordinating a survey across state agencies can be difficult and time consuming, but can produce results that are useful in decision-making,” the Texas state team wrote in their final report.

Connecting the team’s strategies with other health and wellness policy initiatives was also important. In addition to increasing awareness about The Community Guide with ERS and other state agency employees, the team also promoted awareness with a key state legislator by involving a staff person from the Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services. “Partnerships are key,” Creel says.

The team’s work produced benefits that extend beyond promoting awareness and increasing stairwell use. The project increased state health agency employees’ awareness about the Preventive Services Task Force recommendations. In addition, according to Creel, staff members from the Texas Health Institute are now more aware of The Community Guide and its uses, and as a result, they use it in their community health development work with cities and counties.

For more information on evidence-based public health in Texas:

Texas State Team Overview

<http://www.astho.org/Programs/Evidence-Based-Public-Health/TX-State-Showcase-2012/>

“The Texas Community Guide Team,” Presentation

<http://nnphi.org/CMSuploads/Head%20-Texas%20Community%20Guide%20Team.pdf>

Building Healthy Texans Worksite Wellness Toolkit (includes a link to the Worksite Wellness Index Assessment Tool)

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wellness/wwt.shtm>

Texas Department of State Health Services, Employer Wellness Resources

<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/wellness/worksiteresources.shtm>

Long Live Texans: Workplace Action Guide (contains links to additional wellness resources)

http://www.healthyplaceshealthypeople.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Workplace_Action_Guide.pdf

Texas Health Institute, Obesity Resources

<http://www.texashealthinstitute.org/obesity.html>



Evidence-Based Public Health Case Study

ASTHO Action Sheet on Point-of-Decision Prompts

<http://www.astho.org/t/pb/mult.aspx?pageid=5997>

CDC Healthier Worksite Initiative, Motivational Signs

http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/toolkits/stairwell/motivational_signs.htm

CDC Healthier Worksite Initiative: StairWELL to Better Health

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/toolkits/stairwell/index.htm>