

Colorado Implements Comprehensive Worksite Wellness Program

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment launched a holistic employee wellness program to promote health through physical activity, healthy eating, and positive lifestyle choices.

Colorado is one of the healthiest and leanest states in the nation, however the prevalence of obesity among adults has doubled over the past 15 years.¹ Obesity-related healthcare expenditures cost Colorado taxpayers more than \$1 billion per year.² In response, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) Prevention Services Division developed the Obesity Integration Project to identify, select, and prioritize health strategies to combat obesity in Colorado. The Obesity Integration Project includes 12 evidence-based public health strategies, one of which is the worksite wellness initiative.

Since the launch of the worksite wellness initiative in 2011, state agencies across Colorado have implemented several health programs and policies related to tobacco cessation, physical activity, healthy eating, and breastfeeding. Currently, many worksite wellness programs across the nation focus strictly on physical activity and nutrition, however, CDPHE demonstrates that other state agencies can address obesity by providing holistic wellness programs for employees.

Steps Taken:

To achieve measurable outcomes and keep pace with emerging public health challenges in the state, CDPHE and Gov. John Hickenlooper developed a list of public health and environmental priorities, known as Colorado's 10 Winnable Battles. Obesity was identified as one of the winnable battles, resulting in the formation of the Obesity Integration Project. CDPHE's Prevention Services Division developed and implemented strategies to address the obesity issue, which included worksite wellness programs and policies.

- 55 percent of employees participating in the CDPHE worksite wellness program felt that it increased their satisfaction with their job.³
- 75 percent of CDPHE worksite wellness program participants felt that it improved their opinion of CDPHE as a positive place to work.³

The following worksite wellness programs and policies are either in development or implementation phases at CDPHE:

- CDPHE is working to expand a breastfeeding and lactation policy that was first enacted in 2007. The policy is currently implemented on four state government campuses across the state, requiring human resources staff to inform pregnant employees of the policy and the location of designated lactation rooms before maternity leave. The policy allows new mothers to take at least two breaks, up to 20 minutes per day, and a lunch break to pump, up to two years after the child's birth. The policy is based on the [Colorado Workplace Accommodation for Nursing Mother's Act and Fair Labor Standards Act, Federal Section 4207, Reasonable Break Time for Nursing Mothers](#).

- In May 2012, CDPHE launched a wellness break policy to increase physical activity among employees and allow time for physical activities during the work day, including exercise breaks. Exercise breaks can be taken as two 15-minute periods or used in one 30-minute session. Employees are not permitted to use breaks at the beginning of the day, end of the day, or to expand the lunch break. CDPHE renovated an office storage room into a wellness room for employees to play ping pong, and participate in low cost and free exercise classes.
- In August 2013, CDPHE worked in collaboration with the governor's office and the Department of Personnel Administration (DPA) to launch a worksite diabetes prevention program. The 16-week program is based on the [CDC's National Diabetes Prevention Program Training Curriculum \(DPP\)](#) and provides participants information on nutritious foods, portion sizes, food labels, and physical activity to prevent the onset or progression of diabetes. The program also conducts A1C tests to detect Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. CDPHE is currently working with the DPA to offer screening at all state agencies and to provide onsite or nearby DPP classes for state employees.
- CDPHE passed a tobacco policy in December 2013 that prohibits the use of all tobacco products in buildings, state-owned vehicles, parking lots, and on sidewalks on property owned or leased by CDPHE. This includes smokeless products and electronic cigarettes among employees, temporary workers, clients, contractors, and visitors. CDPHE is committed to supporting FDA approved tobacco cessation medications and cessation counseling for its employees.
- In 2013, CDPHE launched a 6-month alternative transportation pilot program to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation (e.g., public transit, bicycling, and car-pooling) to and from work, during work, and outside of work hours. During the pilot CDPHE provided coupon books to employees for specified modes of transportation. For instance, vouchers valued at \$25 were given to state employees for every \$100 they invoiced through the car/van pool or ride sharing programs. In addition, CDPHE provided administration time off for each day an employee did not use their car. The 6-month pilot revealed program interest and employee support. As a result, CDPHE leadership are currently working on creating a sustainable and long-term transportation alternatives program.

Results:

- A 32 question survey was administered in March 2012 to measure the impact of CDPHE's worksite wellness initiatives. The results revealed that employees were interested in wellness programming, health behaviors, and future health programs. Overall, 60 percent of the 662 CDPHE employees that were surveyed participated in wellness activities. Specifically, 55 percent of respondents reported they felt increased job satisfaction and 75 percent reported improved opinions of CDPHE as a positive place to work. Eighty-five percent of the employees that were surveyed feel as if they are in good to excellent health.
- Survey results related to mental health and sleep were a shock to CDPHE. Nearly 90 percent of respondents reported they do not get enough sleep during the week. 40 percent reported they felt depressed or hopeless at least one day a week. CDPHE is currently developing a stress management education program in response to the results.

Lessons Learned:

- The dedication of the Wellness Advisory Board, Wellness Committees, and staff were crucial to the success of CDPHE's wellness program. The Wellness Advisory Board brought together leadership to promote the worksite wellness initiative across the organization.
- The evaluation survey revealed two main barriers that reduced employees' participation in the worksite wellness program: a perceived lack of support from leadership and limited time in the day to exercise. In response, CDPHE created the worksite wellness policy, which encourages supervisors to provide up to 30 minutes of time for physical activity during the workday. Currently, CDPHE actively promotes awareness of the wellness break policy and assists managers with communication of the policy.

For more information:

Dan McKenna
Worksite Wellness Manager
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)
Email: daniel.mckenna@state.co.us
<http://www.colorado.gov>

Kristen Wan
Senior Analyst, Health Promotion and Transformation
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)
Email: kwana@astho.org

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