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**Health Department Grants Aim to Boost Worksite Wellness**

*Six awards of \$3,000 will be given to worksites in the Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, Middlebury, Morrisville and Newport areas*

BURLINGTON – Employers looking to create or improve a workplace wellness program can apply for a financial boost from the Vermont Department of Health.

The Health Department is offering grants of \$3,000 to six worksites around the state to build sustainable wellness programs that focus on increasing physical activity and healthy eating opportunities for employees. The grants are supported through the department's Local Health Offices. Because of limited funding, the department alternates which areas of the state are eligible for a grant each year. This year, worksites with between five to 100 employees in the Local Health service areas of Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, Middlebury, Morrisville and Newport are eligible to apply. The other regions were eligible in 2016.

The *Working Toward Wellness* grants provide businesses with funding and technical assistance to design a wellness program that fits the scale and culture of their organization. The programs would support activities that promote employee physical activity and healthy eating, such as bike share programs, active workstations and installation of water stations. Over the past three years, the department awarded \$60,000 in wellness grants to 20 worksites throughout Vermont.

Employers can apply for a grant and find a full program description and submission requirements at <http://www.vermontbidsystem.com/BidPreview.aspx?BidID=22832>. The deadline to apply is August 15, 2017.

The grants are funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program [State Public Health Action to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health](#). This national effort focuses on chronic disease prevention

by promoting healthy environments in workplaces, schools, early childhood education facilities, and in the community. In Vermont, more than 60 percent of adults employed outside the home are either overweight or obese, and more than half have at least one chronic condition.

“When you think about how much of our lives are spent in the workplace, it becomes an opportunity to improve our health and wellbeing,” said Julie Arel, the Health Department’s director of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. “When workplace culture and policies promote employee health – such as encouraging physical activity like “walking meetings” and offering smart food choices – there is a huge return on investment for both individuals and the company,” Arel explained.

Arel said that not only do small lifestyle changes in the workplace help improve employee health, but they also make good business sense. “The data shows that worksites with sustained wellness programs see significant benefits to their bottom line.” According to the CDC, lost productivity due to absenteeism costs employers an estimated \$1,685 per employee. And costs due to employees who are at work but not able to perform fully because of sickness or stress, are even higher.

In addition to funding, Health Department staff will work throughout the year with grantees to develop, implement and evaluate a sustainable worksite wellness program.

Learn more about worksite wellness in Vermont, visit <http://www.healthvermont.gov/3-4-50/businesses>.

For more information about our Local Health Offices and the areas they serve, go to <http://www.healthvermont.gov/local>.

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