

Vermont Worksite Wellness Resource

Creating a Healthier Worksite

Section 1: Getting Started



Why Worksite Wellness?

For much of the week, most Vermonters spend more than one third of their day at their workplace. The programs, policies and environment at their worksite significantly influence the health of employees and their families. Worksites can also have a positive impact on the health of the communities they are located in.

Worksite wellness strategies cover a wide range of topics, from reducing injury at the workplace to supporting emotional wellbeing. Worksites can also play an important role in helping to reduce chronic disease. Vermonters are more likely to die from chronic disease than all other causes of death combined. Through programs, policies and healthy environments, worksites can help support healthy behaviors that reduce chronic disease risk.

Worksite Wellness and the Bottom Line

Businesses also benefit financially from prioritizing worksites wellness. Lost productivity, absenteeism and direct medical expenses are costly for employers.

- Lost productivity due to absenteeism costs employers an estimated \$1,685 per employee. – *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*
- Lost productivity costs due to poor presenteeism (where employees are at work but not able to perform fully because of sickness or stress) are even higher. – *Harvard Business Review*
- The cost of obesity for a company with 1,000 employees is estimated to be \$277,000 per year. – *CDC*
- Employed adults miss more than 164 million hours a year due to dental issues. – *Surgeon General*
- Direct healthcare costs attributable to six factors—body mass index (BMI), blood pressure, total cholesterol, blood glucose, tobacco use and alcohol use—accounts for an added \$623 per employee every year. – *Thomson Reuters Workforce Wellness Index*

Worksite wellness programs can result in significant savings for employers. An analysis of over 50 studies on worksite health promotion programs showed an average of:

- 27 percent reduction in sick leave absenteeism
- 26 percent reduction in health care costs
- 32 percent reduction in workers' compensation and disability claims
- savings of \$5.81 for each dollar spent on wellness

Worksite wellness programs can also increase employee morale, improve productivity when at work and decrease turnover.





Five Steps to a Worksite Wellness Program

If you are just starting with implementing a wellness program, you can follow these five steps to establish a strong foundation for your worksite. The following pages will discuss each of these steps in more detail, provide tips on engaging and motivating employees, and provide the components of a comprehensive wellness program.

Step 1: Form a Wellness Team

- Identify the individuals that will spearhead wellness programs and gain leadership support.
- Develop a vision and mission that will guide wellness programs.

Step 2: Assess Your Worksite

- Assess your worksite to identify any gaps in existing policies and programs.
- Assess the needs and interests of your employees.

Step 3: Identify Strategies

- Identify strategies from the Health Department's Six Core Outcomes for Healthy Worksites to implement over the next 6–12 months (see Section 2).
- Develop an implementation plan that includes:
 - a timeline
 - specific goals and objectives
 - methods of communicating the strategy/ies to your employees

Step 4: Implement

- Implement your selected strategy or strategies.

Step 5: Evaluate

- Evaluate your program by assessing employee participation and satisfaction.

Step 1: Form a Wellness Team

Having leadership support is the backbone of any successful employee wellness program. Organizational leadership is crucial in obtaining financial resources, linking your wellness program goals to business outcomes and implementing policy and environmental changes in the workplace.

If you haven't already gained leadership support, this is the first task. It is important to inform and engage leadership with your wellness vision. Making your case can involve communicating the benefits of a wellness program—including the vision, outcomes, and any assessment or employee feedback.

Form a wellness team to ensure representation and input from all areas of the organization—and to share the work. Recruit wellness team members who represent diversity in age, culture, gender, sexual orientation and disability status, as well as from all areas of the organization, such as:

- leadership
- organizational and development
- Employee Assistance Program providers
- food service
- maintenance
- finance
- human resources
- individual departments
- marketing/public relations
- sales
- board members
- safety
- insurance providers
- occupational health

A wellness team can:

- assess the health risks and current lifestyle behaviors of employees through health interest/needs surveys.
- assess current policies and environmental factors that may affect employee wellness.
- evaluate existing resources and gaps in services.
- plan and implement the wellness program.
- conduct financial planning for implementation of the wellness program.
- establish and enhance relationships with other community organizations and government agencies to partner on shared goals—for example, encouraging active transportation in partnership with an environmental group to promote physical activity and decrease pollution.

What is the vision and mission of your company's wellness program?

As you begin the steps to identify wellness strategies, it is important to have a broader vision and mission for your wellness program to help guide your strategies to accomplish a broader purpose. If your organization has an organizational mission statement, aligning the vision and mission of the wellness program can create a pathway for leadership and employees to understand and support the purpose of the program.

Step 2: Assess Your Worksite

Assessments should be completed before implementing programs to ensure they meet the needs of employees and the organization. Conduct an assessment of the organization and the employee. The assessment of your organization can include the physical and cultural environment, policies, health benefit design and current wellness programming. A good understanding of current employee behaviors and interest areas will help you tailor the wellness program to your organization.

The organizational assessment:

- determines your worksite's strengths
- draws attention to areas in need of improvement
- highlights opportunities to make the worksite more supportive of healthy behaviors

Take an organizational assessment online or download a PDF at <http://healthvermont.gov/wellness/physical-activity-nutrition/workplace>

The employee assessment includes items such as:

- health screenings
- employee interests
- employee needs

Toolkit ▶ *Employee Interest Survey*

Step 3: Identify Strategies

Once the assessments are completed, use the information gathered to identify one or more strategies to promote employee wellness. The next section provides examples of many strategies for six core outcome areas for a healthy worksite.

After identifying strategies, develop an implementation plan that includes:

- a timeline
- specific goals and objectives
- methods of communicating the strategy to your employees

Creating Goals and Objectives

Goals are broad statements that describe what is to be accomplished. Objectives state the expected amount of change in behavior, attitude, knowledge or condition—to whom by when. Objectives should:

- have measurable language such as “increase” or “decrease”
- clearly identify the behavior, attitude, condition or knowledge to be changed
- establish the timeframe within which an activity takes place
- determine the magnitude of the anticipated change (when possible)
- determine how change will be measured

Make your objectives “**SMART**”:

- S**pecific
- M**easurable
- A**chievable
- R**ealistic
- T**ime sensitive

For example:

Goal 1: Our workplace will promote an active lifestyle

Objective 1: By year 1, a policy will be in place allowing flextime for physical activity.

Objective 2: By year 2, maps of nearby trails and walking routes will be provided to all employees.

Toolkit ▶ *Activity Prioritizing Tool, Action Plan Worksheet*

Step 4: Implement

Three key considerations in implementing your selected strategies are awareness, accessibility, and inclusion.

Awareness

Make sure that employees know about any changes to the workplace or any new offerings available to them. See page 10 for more information on communicating with employees.

Accessibility

Make sure details about the selected strategies and any relevant resources are easily accessible for all employees. For example, if your strategy requires computer access (such as signing up for a wellness challenge or accessing a wellness portal) but some employees do not have computer access during the workday, create an alternative option (such as signing up by calling a contact on the wellness team or ensuring a mobile phone option is available).

Inclusion

Ensure that opportunities to participate are available to all employees, regardless of age, cultural or religious practices, gender, sexual orientation and disability status. In certain cases, a selected strategy might focus on one part of the population more than another (for example, a breast cancer awareness campaign might target female employees), but promote inclusiveness to the greatest extent possible.

Some examples:

- Provide wheelchair-friendly options for a walking challenge.
- Make sure selected activities are sensitive to diverse cultural and religious beliefs.
- Provide translated, large-print, or other adapted versions of written materials.
- Look for resources on creating accessible gardens when developing a plan for a worksite garden.
- Include the opportunity to verbally receive information about programs, policies, or awareness campaigns.

Step 5: Evaluate

Worksites should plan to evaluate any aspects of a wellness program. It is important to assess whether strategies are being effective in accomplishing the established goals and objectives and whether they align with the broader vision and mission of the wellness program. It is also important to assess how employees and management are receiving the program, and any return on investment.

Evaluation can help identify successes and areas for improvement, as well as advise next steps.

A few ways to evaluate a wellness program are:

- tracking participation rates
- employee surveys to look at changes in behaviors
- employee surveys to look at employee satisfaction
- medical claims analysis to look at changes in health outcomes
- productivity metrics, such as measuring absenteeism
- biometric measures



Engaging Your Employees

Communication

Employee engagement in your wellness program may be one of the biggest challenges you face. A written communication plan can help you achieve many of the goals and objectives of your program. If employees do not know about the wellness program or how it will benefit them, they will not participate.

A communication plan can:

- increase awareness
- increase knowledge
- reinforce attitudes
- maintain interest
- provide cues and motivation for action
- demonstrate simple skills
- build social norms

Communication channels can include:

- media
- newsletters
- direct mailings
- company website
- social media
- emails
- text messages
- podcasts
- meetings

Also consider:

- **Branding:** Branding with a name/logo can provide recognition and visibility for your wellness program.
- **Status updates:** Provide regular status updates to employees.
- **Messaging:** Use culturally-appropriate communication, including messaging that address the overall value and purpose of the wellness program to the organization and the employee.
- **Recruiting staff members with marketing and communications skills** to be part of the wellness team.

Employee Readiness

Employees will likely be in varying states of behavior change (explained below) when you begin to implement your wellness program. Some may already be living healthy lifestyles, while others might not be thinking about making changes. Employee readiness can influence the outcomes of your wellness program. Information from employee interest surveys can help determine how motivated and ready employees are to make changes, as well as what strategies will be most likely to be accepted.

Below are the five stages of change. People may move from one stage to another in order, or they may move back and forth between stages until they adopt a behavior for good. Moving to an earlier stage is not a failure, but an important part of the behavior change process. The stages of change are:

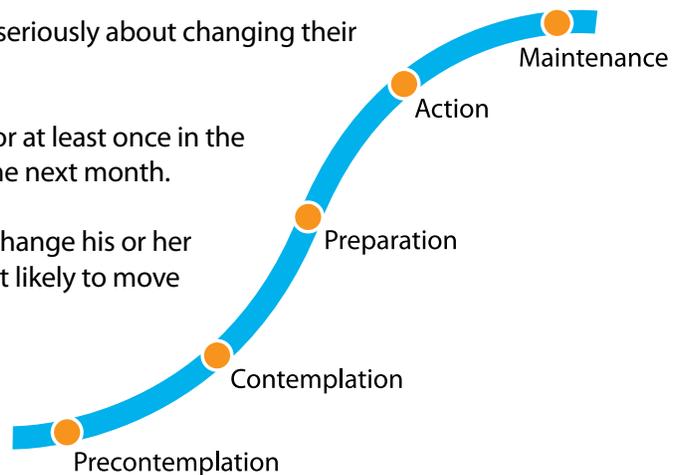
Pre-contemplation: An individual is not thinking about changing their behavior in the near future.

Contemplation: An individual is beginning to think seriously about changing their behavior in the next six months.

Preparation: An individual tried to change a behavior at least once in the past year and is thinking about trying again within the next month.

Action: An individual is taking real steps to actively change his or her behavior. This is the stage where an individual is most likely to move back to an earlier stage.

Maintenance: An individual has changed their behavior for more than six months and is now maintaining the change.



Motivation

Some factors to consider to help employees stay motivated include:

- **Time:** Try to work activities into employees' existing schedules (e.g., provide time off for accessing preventative care).
- **Access:** Make sure activities are accessible (e.g., host them on-site or provide transportation)
- **Knowledge:** Provide information on the benefits of participating in an activity and additional related resources.
- **Cost:** Whenever possible, make sure activities are free.
- **Incentives:** If possible, provide incentives for participation, such as prizes.

State and federal laws may be applicable to the use of financial incentives tied to health status. Make sure to research and comply with any laws. Two specific laws to research before using financial incentives are the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Affordable Care Act (ACA). For more information, see resources provided by the Public Health Law Center at www.publichealthlawcenter.org/topics/healthy-eating/worksite-wellness/resources.



Types of Worksite Wellness Programs

A comprehensive worksite wellness program will include all of the following components: awareness, education, behavior change, policy and environment change. Depending on your worksite's needs, resources and vision, you may choose to initially focus on one or two components and slowly work toward a comprehensive worksite wellness program over time.

Awareness

Awareness interventions bring health topics to light that employees may not have considered. They highlight key facts and health risks related to certain behaviors and/or health conditions. Examples include:

- activity challenges
- health screenings/biometric screenings

Education

Education interventions are more formal than awareness programs, and can include classes, presentations or written materials. Education programs can get more in-depth on a particular topic and can provide skill-building activities. Examples include:

- onsite cooking classes
- strength training guides

Behavior Change

Behavior change interventions include evidence-based programs, activities and information designed to support employees in adopting behaviors that will lead to better health. These programs can take more time or resources but can be more effective than awareness or education interventions alone. Examples include:

- health coaching
- a four-week tobacco cessation class
- a six-month diabetes prevention program

Policy and Environment

Policy and environment interventions are often the most effective because they ultimately affect the health status of the highest percentage of employees, more than any other intervention alone. These changes take more time and planning, and require a strong communication plan. Examples include:

- tobacco-free campus policy
- break areas with fridge and microwave for employees to bring their own food
- onsite bike racks, showers or exercise facilities
- onsite garden or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) deliveries

Toolkit ▶ *Sample policies, Ways to Create a Supportive Environment*