

City of Milwaukee Municipality
Development and Implementation of a Worksite Wellness Program

A Well City Initiative was launched in January 2007 by the Greater Milwaukee Committee, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, the YMCA and the Wellness Council of America-Wisconsin Chapter, and the City of Milwaukee to challenge teams from local companies, healthcare systems, educational institutions and municipalities to take a proactive step toward improving the health and well-being of the City's most important asset – employees and their families.

As one of the larger employers in the city, Milwaukee's Mayor Tom Barrett has pledged to lead the efforts to make Milwaukee a “vibrant, healthy city on a Fresh Coast – as THE place to live, work and play!” One of the goals of this city-wide initiative will be to complete and enter the Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA) Well City award by 2009. To be considered for this award, 20 Milwaukee employers that cumulatively employ at least 20 percent of the city's workforce must develop an established wellness program as outlined by the WELCOA model.

The City's vision for improving the health of employees focuses on promoting healthy lifestyles, providing prevention and primary care education, and building a workforce that makes informed decisions regarding its personal health and wellness. This vision is consistent with the City's long-term strategy to control health care costs. The City of Milwaukee Municipality and the Mayor are committed to establishing a city-wide worksite wellness program.

The basic purpose of a worksite wellness program is to improve the health and productivity of a particular working population or work group and to reduce their health related risks and costs. This is attained by helping employees, retirees, their spouses and dependents improve their current status of wellness. A well-defined and disciplined approach to implementing a wellness program is comprised of: capturing executive level support; creating a cohesive wellness team; collecting data to drive a results-oriented initiative; crafting an annual operating plan; choosing appropriate health promotion interventions; creating a supportive, health-promoting environment; and carefully evaluating outcomes.

Statistics

- City of Milwaukee projections show the City costs to provide health care to City employees, retirees and their families could rise from \$100M in 2007 to \$150M by 2012 if nothing is done to change.
- Studies indicate that chronic diseases account for 50-70% of U. S. spending on health care costs.
- Chronic diseases-such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes-are among the most prevalent, costly, and preventable of all health problems.
- Usually 20% of the organizations workforce account for 80% of its health care costs. Unhealthy lifestyles are expensive for both the employer and employee. These high-risk employees translate into increased absenteeism, disability, and lost productivity for the employer.
- Nationally, workers are now paying \$1,094 more in premiums annually for family coverage than they did in 2000.
- According to national reports, the average retiring couple will need \$200,000 in savings just to pay for the most basic medical coverage many experts believe that this figure is conservative and that \$300,000 may be a more realistic number.

Why Worksite Wellness

- Employees spend 50% of their waking hours at work for 40 - 50 years; therefore the worksite offers a logical and consistent opportunity to provide information, encouragement, and support for employees.

- Worksite wellness programs have been shown to effectively improve an employee's health, reduce long-term health care costs and reduce insurance premiums.
- Worksite wellness programs have been shown to increase productivity, decrease absenteeism, and improve morale and loyalty.
- Disease management programs improve the quality of life, decrease health expenditures and significantly decrease risk of diseases.

Why the City of Milwaukee Needs a Wellness Program

- To educate the City of Milwaukee employees on specific strategies and opportunities to impact their health status.
- To reduce absenteeism/sick leave, workers' compensation, and injuries.
- To reduce the utilization of health benefits for preventable issues.
- To increase or improve productivity.
- To improve the morale and decision making of employees.
- To improve retention and recruitment.
- To create healthy, knowledgeable employees who ultimately control health care costs.
- To make sure employees, retirees, and their dependents are getting appropriate preventative services and have an opportunity for an annual health risk assessment.

City of Milwaukee Municipality Proposal

The City of Milwaukee is committed to:

- Controlling health care costs and encouraging long-term behavior change consistent with healthy lifestyles.
- Developing a comprehensive strategy plan for the implementation of a City-wide work site wellness program.
- Utilizing WELCOA's Workplace Wellness program model which includes the seven Benchmarks of Success that will ensure a successful workplace wellness program.
- Choosing appropriate health promotion interventions including: health risk assessment, screening tests, health education, lifestyle modifications, self-care, disease management and prevention.
- Developing a cost-effective model to control costs for preventable diseases while at the same time implementing programs that will be effective and efficient.

Conclusion

A commitment from the Mayor, Unions, Common Council and all City departments will be needed to ensure that the Well Workplace designation is achieved and the Worksite Wellness Program is implemented efficiently and stays viable. Research has proven that healthy lifestyles can reduce health care costs. Each City department, in cooperation with the management team and local unions, will be held accountable for their own wellness team. An advisory committee will be developed to support all city-wide departments in implementing a wellness committee and program.

With the skyrocketing health care costs, it is imperative that the City, its employees and retirees are committed to change. Research has proven that simple and cost effective solutions can be utilized to improve the health of a company's employees, increase productivity, decrease absenteeism, and more. Implementing a wellness program is cost effective for the City, City employees and retirees, and their dependents.