Responses to Questions Submitted During “Workplace Wellness: Walk This Way”
Webinar on October 5, 2017

How can government employees who are not in management positions influence or advocate for walking meetings, active commuting to the workplace, etc.?

Employees may be able to share what they learn about workplace wellness with their supervisors and team members. They may also wish to participate in relevant coalitions. Many states already have statewide coalitions on which wellness promoters regularly participate. Illinois, Indiana, and Utah each has active statewide wellness coalitions. These coalitions can educate key stakeholders about the health problems identified in the assessment as well as evidence-based strategies for addressing those problems. Many local communities also form coalitions to prevent obesity, promote workplace wellness, encourage active transportation, or support other kinds of community health. Those coalitions can be important vehicles for engaging stakeholders on wellness strategies in and around the workplace.

How do you implement a worksite wellness program when the administration sees it as a liability rather than an asset - even when the statistics and data prove otherwise?

Employers are often concerned about liability when implementing wellness policies and programs that encourage physical activity. While liability is often a legitimate concern, the benefits resulting from employees being more physically active (such as improved health, increased productivity, and reduced health care costs) make these policies and programs appealing to many employers, including government agencies.

The types of liability issues that may arise depend on both the policies and programs in place as well as relevant state liability laws. In some states, employers can protect themselves by requiring participating employees to sign a liability waiver; the waiver often clarifies that participation is voluntary and not a requirement of employment. Employers should also review their insurance policies to minimize any liability exposure in case of an injury.

Wellness promoters should consult an employment attorney licensed in their state as well as their state workers’ compensation regulators to identify what state protections exist and what additional policies or strategies may be helpful in their jurisdiction.

I’m interested in learning how to get our city/county more involved in helping our organization promote walking biking and physical activity.

Many local communities also form coalitions to prevent obesity, promote workplace wellness, encourage active transportation, or support other kinds of community health. Those coalitions can be important vehicles for engaging stakeholders on wellness strategies in and around the workplace. They may also want to reach out to their health department and local chapters of the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, and the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity.
I am partnering/working with a small local business that would like to initiate and conduct simple healthy lifestyle changes. I'm interested in learning about your worksite wellness guidelines/suggestions.

For more information on organizational wellness policies, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Worksite Health ScoreCard.

**Because of work place injuries in the past, our employees are only allowed to exercise on their lunch break, not walking meetings, etc. Any suggestions for how to change that culture?**

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**I live in Anchorage, AK and there is a lot of work going into making our city more bike friendly. My question is how can you encourage/support people to spend money on a bike that is safe on snow and ice? Studded tires or fat bikes are a lot of money and not feasible for some people. I feel like that would be a barrier when trying to encourage people to bike to work.**

The Bicycle Commuter Act provides a tax-benefited reimbursement for the expenses of bicycle commuting. The intent of this provision is to help defray some of those fixed costs such as; the purchase of a decent commuter bicycle; bike lock; helmet; bike parking facilities; shower facilities; and general maintenance. The real costs associated with bike commuting are much less than commuting by car but those bike commuters should be able to have help with those costs. Employers might not think this is a huge benefit to them but giving people a little financial incentive is another step in the right direction to build morale. Also, the city may wish to invest in special equipment to remove and sweep snow. This is the case if the combined width of cycle track and buffer, or the cycle track width inside of the raised curb is too narrow for existing street maintenance equipment. Snow removal procedures should minimize the creation of snow banks in the buffer zone, because snow melt flowing across the cycle track can freeze at night, requiring frequent salting in order to avoid hazardous conditions. Snow removal may be simplified by putting the cycle track at sidewalk level or by constructing a raised median between the parking lane and the cycle track. Care should be taken to make physically separated cycle tracks accessible by street maintenance equipment, otherwise street sweeping and/or snow removal will need to be done with specialized equipment. Consider restricting parking at a regularly scheduled time of the week or day to facilitate snow removal and street
Can an employer implement physical activities, bike racks, car pool incentives, walk during lunch, etc without actually writing a policy for it?

Some of these yes (for example adding bike racks). However, for all of these, adopting a policy will make these changes permanent because policy is a tool used to change physical environments, community norms, and the way organizations and systems operate. It has the potential to affect the decisions and behaviors of entire populations. Although policy is just one tool used to improve health outcomes, it often achieves significant results more efficiently, and at a lower cost, than other tools or interventions.

Siobahn- What has been success of program; how is it evaluated?

Our biggest success has been that a greater number of small businesses are implementing comprehensive worksites wellness initiatives. They are targeting individual behavioral change as well as environmental and policy level changes that will lead to more long-term, sustainable changes. In terms of the evaluation, our program has not yet been formally evaluated.

Is there research evidence supporting that tax credits are an effective strategy for encouraging businesses to start wellness programs?

Though the evaluation research is still early, we know workplace wellness tax credits are created to incentivize small businesses to offer workplace wellness programs because small businesses are more likely to face budget, staff, and capacity challenges. As a result, they are substantially less likely to offer wellness programs. For example, only 39% of employers with less than 100 employees offer a wellness program versus over 60% of employers with more than 100 employees. By providing businesses with a monetary incentive, workplace wellness tax credits can increase the number of businesses offering workplace wellness programs. The success of the credit will depend on how it is designed and how it is implemented.

Could we get examples of government agencies that have adopted paid time for physical activity policies?

**Georgia Paid Time Policy:** In this organizational policy, all state public health department employees are able to take 30 minutes per day, 5 days per week, of paid time for participation in physical activity. This policy can serve as an example for other communities that are implementing an organizational, local, or statewide paid time for physical activity policy.

**St. Louis Employees Get The City of St. Louis Department of Personnel** adopted a policy to establish "an official, city-approved employee wellness program."

The employee wellness program, BeeFit, is for city employees and includes provisions for appointing a city wellness coordinator, agency wellness coordinators, funding, administrative support, reporting, and evaluation. The policy also encourages city departments to allow up to 3 hours of paid administrative leave per employee per week. Employees can use the paid time to participate in eligible BeeFit programs and wellness-related activities. Before participating, employees must receive approval from managers or supervisors to use paid time for participation in physical activity.
Types of BeeFit programs in which employees may participate:
- a 10-week weight loss challenge
- yoga classes
- low-impact aerobics
- smoking cessation classes
- Zumba classes
- diabetes prevention and control programs
- blood pressure screenings
- wellness screenings
- flu shots

Can someone provide an example of an organization that provides paid work time for physical activity? What does this look like? How much time is offered? Is there example policy language?

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How do you deal with a large government employer (for example the County or the City) are more focused on risk management and worried about workers’ comp claims and people being injured while they are participating in worksite wellness? For example, we are not allowed to ride a bicycle to a meeting during the work day because of the risk involved.

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programs that encourage physical activity. While liability is often a legitimate concern, the benefits resulting from employees being more physically active (such as improved health, increased productivity, and reduced health care costs) make these policies and programs appealing to many employers, including government agencies.

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