

## Participating in the CDC's National Healthy Worksite Program

### Getting Started

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department had a wellness program in place for a few years, but it ended because of a lack of funding. Staff learned from that experience, and when they heard about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Healthy Worksite Program (NHWP), they saw an opportunity to use the NHWP's comprehensive assessment and technical assistance components to build a new wellness program.

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department applied principles of implementing a comprehensive health promotion program learned during the NHWP by putting in place a combination of programs, policies, and environmental supports to address multiple areas of employee health.

Because the mission of the Health Department is to safeguard and enhance the health of communities in Pierce County, senior leaders and wellness committee members were confident that they could use the NHWP's technical assistance to build a comprehensive and sustainable wellness program. The Health Department had already integrated staff wellness into its 5-year strategic plan, and its leaders

saw participation in the NHWP as a way to share its comprehensive wellness program experience and expertise with other employers in Pierce County. Wellness Coordinator Diane Evans led the charge for the organization to create its *"Wellness Matters"* program.

### Setting Goals

One of the first NHWP activities that the Health Department completed was a baseline assessment of its employees' health in 2013. The assessment included employee health surveys covering health conditions, healthy behaviors, and perceptions about the work environment, as well as biometric screenings. Like all of the employers participating in the NHWP, the Health Department also completed the [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#), a validated organizational tool

## Organization Background

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

- « Established in 1971
- « Industry: Governmental public health
- « Location: Tacoma, Washington
- « 253 Employees

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department tackles known and emerging health risks through policies, programs, and treatment in order to protect public health. Through activities such as preventing and controlling disease outbreaks, educating food workers, and inspecting septic systems, the Health Department promotes healthier communities where people live, work, and play throughout Pierce County. Its vision of "Healthy People in Healthy Communities" includes its own employees.

designed to help employers assess the extent to which they have implemented evidence-based health promotion interventions in their worksites.

The assessment highlighted priority focus areas based on the health risks most prevalent among Health Department employees. The wellness committee set four goals and specific, measurable, relevant, and time-bound objectives to be achieved by the NHWP follow-up assessment in 2015. These goals and objectives are as follows:

- Goal: Healthy Eating.
  - Reduce the percentage of obese employees by 2%.
  - Increase the percentage of employees who eat 5 or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day by at least 5%.
- Goal: Physical Activity.
  - Reduce the percentage of employees who engage in little or no physical activity by at least 5%.
- Goal: Stress Management.
  - Increase the percentage of employees who agree that the Health Department has provided them with the opportunity to manage their stress by at least 5%.
- Goal: Organizational Climate and Support.
  - Increase the percentage of employees who agree that the Health Department has provided opportunities to be physically active and eat a healthy diet.

Evans participated in all NHWP trainings and webinars that addressed the main developmental stages for a wellness program, which are assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. She also participated in monthly technical assistance calls with CDC staff to share updates, get advice, and learn about resources. Evans spends half of her time at the Health Department on wellness duties. The wellness committee meets monthly and has eight members, including a sponsor from the Health Department's management team. Committee members spend an additional 1 hour each month supporting workplace health activities.

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## Program Overview

### Communication Is Key

The wellness committee uses a variety of strategies to share information about wellness and its *Wellness Matters* activities. Committee members send e-mails, make announcements at staff meetings, post information on bulletin boards, and put flyers in employee breakrooms. The committee uses all opportunities to get employees' attention, including posting flyers in the restrooms for "stall talks."

The Health Department also produces a biweekly newsletter for staff, and senior leaders contribute health tips and share stories about how they are embracing wellness. During the Health Department's participation in the NHWP, the wellness committee created an employee website to post information about wellness program activities; healthy recipes; and articles designed to promote the program,

highlight success stories, and feature management role models.

### Setting the Tone with a Worksite Wellness Policy

Evans worked with the Health Department's human resources department and management team to develop a formal worksite wellness policy. The policy promotes and supports employee wellness and provides wellness committee members time to be involved in the program through monthly meetings and other activities.

### Promoting Healthy Eating

In 2009, the Health Department developed a healthy eating policy that set standards for meals and refreshments served at agency-sponsored events. For the 2014 employee picnic, the wellness committee created a healthy menu for the 200 employees who

attended. The Health Department also organized a scavenger hunt that led employees on a walking route with markers along the way linked to the jersey numbers of Seattle Seahawks. The markers had information about healthy options in office vending machines, the location of the employee fitness center, and the location of on-site massage services. At the end of the scavenger hunt, employees were told that they could use the route and time for a walking meeting. It was a fun way for employees to learn how easy it is to conduct a walking meeting.

The wellness committee also promoted Community Supported Agriculture by distributing the 2014 *Pierce County Farm Guide* at the Health Department's Employee Benefits Fair in December 2014. It promoted local farmers' markets and distributed locally grown fruits and vegetables to help entice employees to use the markets. Committee members used the new employee wellness website to share healthy recipes and eating tips.

For a fun demonstration that combined healthy eating and physical activity, the committee brought a "smoothie bike" into the employee breakroom for a few hours.

Employees were encouraged to make their own healthy snacks with foot power. The bike had a pedal-powered blender over the front fender to mix fruits and vegetables into a smoothie.



*Diane Evans tests out the "smoothie bike" in the employee breakroom.*

*Photo provided by Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.*

### **Encouraging More Physical Activity**

The wellness committee promoted multiple ways for employees to be physically active. Employees have access to an on-site exercise facility, and walking meetings are widely promoted and modeled by staff and management at all levels. The committee also found short video clips and posters of stretches and other exercises that employees could perform at their

desks. These were posted in common areas and on the employee wellness website.

The Health Department promotes physical activity

opportunities during the workday, and managers and supervisors support employees' use of short breaks for stretching and exercise.



*Health Department employees walking with the Director of Health.*

*Photo provided by Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.*

### **Moving More on Two Feet and Two Wheels**

The wellness committee also helped set up employee walking groups and promoted a local walking guide to encourage employees to walk with their families outside of work. About 30 employees regularly participated in walking groups in 2014.

With leadership support, the wellness committee recruited a team of 29 employees and family members for the American Heart Association's (AHA's) Heart Walk in 2014. Other employees supported the event by bidding on silent auction items during the employee picnic. The team raised more than \$2,000 and, employees said they enjoyed the walk so much, they want to do more in the future.

Also in 2014, the committee promoted a "bike to work month" and learned that employees and visitors had limited places to park their bikes at the Health Department. The committee worked with the City of Tacoma to install additional bike racks for free.

### **Providing Ways to Reduce Stress**

The wellness committee partnered with another NHWP worksite, Greater Lakes Mental Healthcare, to deliver a presentation on stress management and depression to staff and to promote the Health Department's employee assistance program (EAP). Fifty-four employees attended the presentation. Its popularity prompted the committee to offer monthly self-care discussion groups during which staff shared their personal and professional challenges and got advice and acknowledgment from their colleagues. About 30 employees attended.

*"Many of our employees model healthy behaviors at work and in their own lives, and we support them."*

*—Dr. Anthony L-T Chen, Director of Health,  
Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department*

The wellness committee also used the *Pierce County Worksite Wellness Community Resource Guide* to identify local stress management resources. It promoted these resources, as well as stress management support services from the EAP. It also made sure employees were aware of the individual stress management counseling available through the EAP and the Health Department's insurance plan.

To address stress from a different angle, the Health Department brought in a massage therapist to provide on-site, seated massages each month. Employees signed up online for time slots during the workday and paid for their own sessions. The time slots were filled every month, and 37 employees took advantage of the massages in 2014.

### **Improving Organizational Climate and Support**

In 2014, Dr. Anthony L-T Chen, the Health Department's Director of Health, expanded the department's management team to include middle managers and supervisors. This expansion helped to ensure that managers and supervisors at all levels were focused on the same priorities, including employee wellness. One of the team's focus areas for the year was self-care, which aligned with the efforts of the *Wellness Matters* program. Dr. Chen encouraged management team members to make self-care a priority for themselves and to mentor and support their employees to do the same.

## **Program Success**

The Health Department set up a comprehensive health promotion program that addressed multiple health risks with a combination of programs, policies, and environmental supports. Evans said she believes that the recognition the Health Department has received from others show how successful its efforts have been. For example, in 2015, the Association of

### **Raising Funds and Morale**

Instead of holding its usual bake sale to raise money for the United Way in 2014, the wellness committee found a way to incorporate its *Wellness Matters* objectives of improving healthy eating and building a supportive environment into the fundraising campaign. To encourage coworker support and recognition, the committee built on the 2014 campaign theme of "Be a Super Hero" and encouraged employees to recognize their colleagues'



*Super Power Gram delivery to a health department employee.  
Photo provided by Tacoma-Pierce County  
Health Department.*

"super powers" by sending them "Super Power Grams" in exchange for United Way donations ranging from \$1 to \$10. Because Health Department leaders believe that good employee morale promotes health and productivity, they supported using the annual United Way campaign to leverage the Health Department's supportive culture to raise morale and promote employee health.

In all, 103 Super Power Grams were delivered to employees. During the campaign, staff were encouraged to express themselves through "gratitude graffiti" on large sheets of paper posted on the walls of conference rooms.

*I'm grateful for... "My health... family & friends... supportive boss... my dog... helpful team members... anything that makes me laugh... coffee... chocolate... new opportunities."*

*—Examples of "gratitude graffiti" at Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department*

Washington Cities Employee Benefit Trust named the Health Department one of 111 cities and public agencies to win its WellCity Award. Winners had to meet nine WellCity standards (e.g., policies and procedures, management support, evaluating progress toward objectives). The award included a \$54,000 reduction in medical premium costs for 2016.



The Health Department also attained [Gold Level Fit-Friendly Worksite](#) status from AHA by implementing at least six of AHA's physical activity criteria, two of its nutrition criteria, and at least one of its culture criteria (e.g., organization appoints an internal wellness program coordinator to be available to employees for consultation).



*Diane Evans accepts the Gold Level Fit Friendly Worksite award from Jessica Sire of the American Heart Association. Photo provided by Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.*

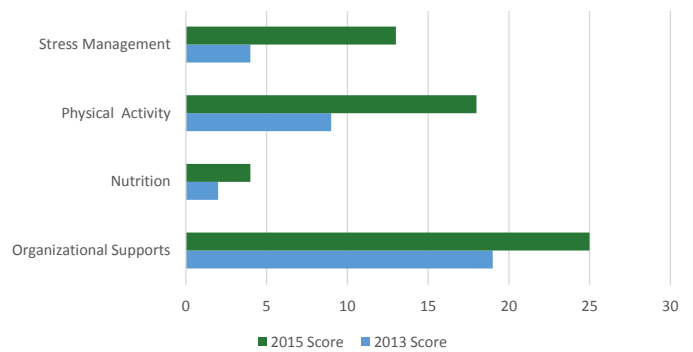
After it finished the NHWP in 2015, the Health Department completed the CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard again as part of its follow-up assessment. The Health Department improved its total ScoreCard score from 101 to 174 out of a possible 264 points by increasing its score in several areas, including its goal areas of nutrition, physical activity, and stress.

Some examples of the evidence-based strategies that the Health Department received points for in its 2015 ScoreCard, that it did not have in place in 2013, included the following:

- Offering and promoting an on-site or nearby farmers' market where fresh fruits and vegetables were sold.
- Providing organized physical activity programs for employees.
- Providing stress management programs.
- Training managers to identify and reduce workplace stress.

The Health Department made the largest gains in its score for the Organizational Supports module, which assesses the extent to which organizations have a foundation and infrastructure in place to support and maintain a workplace health promotion program. The Health Department now promotes and markets health promotion programs to employees; uses examples of employee role models for appropriate health behaviors or success stories in marketing materials; uses and combines incentives with other strategies to increase participation in health promotion programs; and sets annual organizational objectives for health promotion.

**CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard Overall Score in Wellness Programming, 2013-2015**



In 2013, 58 employees completed the baseline health assessment. In 2015, 95 employees completed the follow-up assessment, including 60 of the original 158. The assessment data related to the issues that the wellness committee focused its efforts on, are summarized in the tables below.

2013 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile (Employees = 158)	
<b>Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey</b>	
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	13%
Engage in little or no physical activity	51%
High stress	39%
<b>Biometric Screening</b>	
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	41%
Obesity (Body mass index >30)	32%

2015 Employee Health Issues and Lifestyle Risks Profile (Employees = 95)*i	
<b>Self-Reported Health Assessment Survey</b>	
Eat at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables	23%
Engage in little or no physical activity	27%
High stress	42%
<b>Biometric Screening</b>	
Overweight (Body mass index 25.0-29.9)	45%
Obesity (Body mass index >30)	23%
*Percentages include all employees who provided data in 2015, including those who did not complete the 2013 assessment.	

When the data were analyzed for just the 60 employees who completed both health assessments, the Health Department found that the percentage who were eating at least 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables had increased from 12% in 2013 to 26% in 2015. The percentage who were engaging in little or no physical activity decreased from 46% in 2013 to 31% in 2015. The percentage who were obese or overweight stayed the same: 27% and 42%, respectively.

In 2015, a higher percentage of employees said that the work environment at the Health Department supported their health and well-being at the organizational, supervisory, and coworker level.

Percentage of Employees Who Agree or Strongly Agree		
	2013 (N = 158)	2015 (N = 95)
My organization encourages me to make suggestions about employee health and well-being.	56%	65%
My supervisor encourages healthy behaviors.	64%	70%
My coworkers would support my use of sick days for illness/mental health.	77%	86%
My employer has provided me with the opportunity to:		
Be physically active	68%	71%
Eat a healthy diet	45%	53%
Manage stress	20%	40%

### Leadership Support Is Critical

Evans said she thinks that having Dr. Chen as a strong advocate and role model of employee wellness was critical to the wellness program's success. Dr. Chen's perspective is that everybody in the Health Department plays a role in increasing wellness, not just the wellness committee. The Health Department's expanded management team helped bring managers and supervisors on board. Staff and supervisors at all levels began to promote and support wellness and self-care in 2015, further integrating the Health Department's wellness program with its overall organizational strategy.



The Health Department's Heart Walk 2014 team of employees and family members. Photo provided by Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.

### Challenges

The Health Department's greatest challenge is being a government agency with public scrutiny of how money is spent on incentives and rewards for its employees. The Health Department has relied primarily on nonmonetary incentives and services, but other organizations have donated services (e.g., the on-site massages) in some instances. When the Health Department does receive resources for incentives, its leaders are thoughtful about how to use these resources to reinforce healthy choices.

For example, the committee received tokens that could be used at the farmers' market, and it strongly encouraged employees to use them to buy fresh vegetables.

Another challenge, which is common for many organizations, has been maintaining the energy and commitment levels of the wellness committee members, given all of their regular job responsibilities. But Evans noted that they have accomplished quite a bit in a very short time.

## What's Next?

The Health Department plans to maintain the positive changes it has made to its worksite culture and employee health, and those employees involved in the NHWP efforts are looking for new areas to make improvements. Specifically, the Health Department plans to

- Produce more walking maps to encourage employees to explore local areas on foot.
- Introduce standing workstations for employees to use on a rotating basis and provide ergonomic guidelines for their correct use.
- Apply for the WellCity Award in 2016.



*The National Healthy Worksite Program was designed to help employers put into action science- and practice-based disease-prevention and wellness strategies that would lead to specific measurable health outcomes to reduce chronic disease rates. From 2013-2015, each participant received support, training, and technical assistance to put in place a combination of program, policy, and environmental interventions to support physical activity, good nutrition, and tobacco-use cessation.*