

## Various Approaches to Creating a Wellness Program that fits the needs of your municipality

To reiterate what has already been posted on the website, when starting a Wellness Program, it is very important to:

1. Develop Exemplary Management Support
2. Appoint a Wellness Coordinator
3. Organize a Wellness Committee
4. Find out what is important to the employees
5. Start small and work up from there



These are guidelines but by no means the rules. It is vital to have top management believe that this is indeed important and to support all efforts whole-heartedly. Thus, the **first step** in planning for a Wellness Program is to get the Mayor and Council to adopt the Wellness Policy. After getting their consent, the policy will need to be adopted at the township level.



It is also crucial to have a designated employee (coordinator) and/or group of employees committed to making sure this project gets off the ground and continues to work. All stand to benefit from these efforts. I understand that it is difficult, especially for smaller municipalities, to have the people resources enabling a distinct “wellness group” to be appointed. The best alternative could be to incorporate your Wellness efforts into your Safety Committee, afterall, safety and wellness do go hand-in-hand. Therefore, the

**second step** would be to have Wellness as a constant item on the Safety Meeting agenda.

### Access the interests and needs of the Employees

As started above, one of the 5 Steps in starting a Wellness Program is to learn what is important to your employees. This can be done by distributing the Employee Survey available on the JIF website. It's short and to the point. It will give us some measure of what is most important to your employees in terms of wellness topics and activities. This will help in the design and implementation of future action that may help motivate them to participate and ultimately reap the benefits of better health.



There are different approaches we can take depending on the size of your municipality, available resources, and the level of interest and commitment that can be made to keep the program running. The list of action items and ideas that follow are not a comprehensive list and are mentioned as a way to initiate thought and help us start to develop a program that works for your municipality.

The goal is not to try one thing and then stop. In order to see the benefits of a wellness program, it needs to be an on-going and ever-evolving program. We want to

bring awareness to the employee's and provide them with tools and information they can use to make healthier choices and stay motivated to continue on the path of physical, mental and social well-being. As the employer, it is not your responsibility to mandate change, but to support it for those who are ready to make the commitment to a healthier lifestyle.

### The Behavior Change Progression



#### **Approach #1 – Awareness**

Change has to come from within. But since most of our time is spent at work, it's an ideal setting to bring awareness and education to your employees, providing them with the necessary tools to make intelligent decisions and choices. With this approach, the goal is to keep the idea and importance of wellness in the forefront of everyone's mind. It usually does not result in a behavioral change. Focus on those topics that are of greatest interest to your employees and the greatest needs of your municipality, in that order. Avoid topics with narrow appeal. (this information can be obtained from the employee survey responses.)

#### **Types of information:**

- ⤴ Information on specific conditions: heart health, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, smoking, stress management, nutrition and exercise
- ⤴ Target "how to make healthy food choices" (Eat this, Not that)
- ⤴ Provide Health Facts (Weekly or Monthly basis)
- ⤴ Post Motivational Quotes (Weekly or Monthly basis)
- ⤴ Distribute Healthy Recipes
- ⤴ Post nutritional information on local restaurants or lunchtime favorites

#### **Ways this can be communicated:**

- ⤴ Paycheck stuffers
- ⤴ Email
- ⤴ Newsletter
- ⤴ Employee lounge/cafeteria bulletin boards
- ⤴ Flyers/Posters in Office area and Stairways
- ⤴ Pamphlets/Brochures displayed (many can be obtained from local hospitals and health departments)



#### **Approach #2 – Educational**

You will need to offer educational seminars/lectures/videos at the convenience of your employees. Perhaps during lunchtime breaks. Some employees may be willing to stay after work to attend these programs, but more than likely, during the day you will have the most participation.

These are one-time activities that should not take up much of your employee's time in order to hold everyone's attention. Many presentations are offered through local hospitals and Health Departments at no cost. For more tailored topics or ones requiring a professional doctor or nutritionist, there may be a nominal fee. This cost can be covered by using your available SIP or OSP funds. The purpose of these presentations is to educate and prepare participants for a behavioral change, providing them with tools they can apply to their daily lifestyle.

### **Types of Activities**

- ⤴ Learning Seminars; Lunchtime education; Lunch and Learns – this can be on any topic of interest, for example: stress management, making healthy food choices, the importance of exercise, keeping your heart healthy, smoking cessation, diabetes, etc.
- ⤴ Video/DVD's from MEL or purchase through SIP budget
- ⤴ Disease management support and educational groups
- ⤴ Fitness Professional to show exercises that can be done at work
- ⤴ Posters or Flyers showing Stretches that can be done before/after each shift
- ⤴ Health Risk Assessments available online through HIF or by your Primary Physician
- ⤴ Offer flu shots for employees and family members
- ⤴ Offer periodic Health Screenings (such as blood pressure, sugar level, cholesterol, etc.) available through your local health department, hospital services, primary physician, and Fitness Centers



### **Approach #3 – Behavioral Activities**

Develop activities based on your program goals and the specific needs/interests of your employees. These programs are designed as 4 to 8 weekly sessions or workshops to provide health and wellness education, address barriers and provide opportunities to practice the desired skills. These typically require more of a financial investment and more employee commitment, time and effort. They also require environmental and organizational support in order for them to happen and be successful. The results are often the desired positive lifestyle change, which, if sustained, can lead to potential cost savings in medical and worker's compensation claims and a happier work environment.

### **Types of Activities:**

- ⤴ Weight management classes or Weight Watchers At Work requiring a minimum of 20 participants
- ⤴ Smoking Cessation
- ⤴ Exercise Classes on-site
- ⤴ Fitness Equipment available on-site
- ⤴ Discounted memberships to local fitness centers
- ⤴ Healthy snack choices over junk food (employee break



room or vending machines)

- ▲ Hold Walking Meetings if possible (hold meetings outside while taking a walk)
- ▲ Promote walking during breaks and other off-time periods
- ▲ Bring healthy foods for meetings
- ▲ Coordinate a weekly or monthly healthy lunch club
- ▲ Have a Wellness Day – can use that as a kick-off to a new Wellness Program idea or challenge or as a stand-alone event. This can be comprised of all 3 approaches at once: available information to increase awareness, provide speaker on special topic of interest, and offer a demo exercise class to entice future participation. Hold it during working hours.

▲ Monthly Challenges:

- Eat more fruits and vegetables – set a number that employee's can strive to achieve
- Walking contest – challenge employee's to walk the furthest distance, longest time or most steps during a set time period. The challenge can be on an individual basis, as a team or department to make it more interesting and develop support and camaraderie.
- Spin the “Wellness Wheel” – identify various challenges that can be done throughout the month and place them on a “wheel of wellness”. Employee's take turns (or winner of last challenge) can spin to see what challenge is next! (Challenges: activities that focus on practicing a desired behavior and continue for 4-8 weeks and focus on specific topics such as physical activity, nutrition, or stress management.)



**Types of Incentives:**

Incentives do not have to be a part of every wellness activity. One idea I've read is to reward cooperation, not outcomes. Offering financial incentives for wellness outcomes could amount to paying healthy people for doing what they're already doing and punishing those with barriers in achieving the goal of the challenge. Make it easy for employees to monitor and celebrate progress. And emphasize fun! There are tangible and non-tangible incentives:

**Tangible Incentives:**



- Merchandise Goods (visors, water bottles, t-shirts, gym bags, healthy cookbooks, pedometers, heart rate monitors)
- Financial rewards (cash, gift cards, reimbursement on fitness club attendance)
- Immediate or future time off (take a “well day”)

**Non-tangible Incentives:**

- Acceptance or Approval
- Recognition
- Ability to Contribute
- Creative Outlet
- Meet Personal Challenge
- Group Competition (team building, social cohesion)
- Set a good example (featured in employee newsletter)



- Opportunity for Humor, Fun and light-heartedness