

MARYLAND WORKS: WELLNESS PROGRAMS MOTIVATE CHANGE

Mini-grants to local health departments jump-start employee physical activity and healthy eating

Public Health Problem

- Active adults who eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight derive many benefits for themselves and their employers, including lower health care costs, less absenteeism, better quality of life and higher productivity.
- Adults spend a large part of their day at work making this an important site for reaching them with tested wellness programs that promote healthy lifestyle behaviors.
- With healthy eating and regular physical activity people are more likely to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Program

- The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Obesity Prevention Program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, awarded small grants to seven local health departments to implement workplace wellness programs with the goal of increasing fruit & vegetable intake and daily physical activity of employees.
- Tested wellness programs were implemented, including *Active for Life, Take Action*, the *America on the Move* walking challenge, an on-site *Weight Watchers* class and others. Programs included various activities, for example physical activity or fruit & vegetable team challenges, incentives for participation, educational sessions, personal goal-setting, promotional email messages, changes in vending machine items, policies for foods served at meetings and often an administrative directive to allow physical activity breaks during the workday.

Impact

- Positive results of the seven wellness programs include:
 - Participants increased their physical activity, are eating more fruits and vegetables or are achieving a healthier weight because of the interventions at a number of sites.
 - A permanent walking group formed at one site
 - More than a third of participants in another site maintained changes in diet even three months after the nutrition phase of the program.
 - An existing wellness committee has developed a renewed focus & more members
- Individual workers reported:
 - A weight loss of twenty-four pounds which helped this worker lower her blood sugar level. She continues to work at losing her excess weight with support from co-workers and the daily walk break encouraged by her employer.
 - Another worker says “she can’t wait until its time for her afternoon walk” each day.

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