

SUCCESS OF HEALTHY EMPLOYEE LIFESTYLE PROGRAM BRINGS EXPANSION

Wellness program provides incentives to employees to live a healthier life

Public Health Problem

- Arkansas ranks near the bottom on a list of the healthiest states.
- Most people spend a large part of their day at work where the benefits of employee wellness programs can include reduced absenteeism, greater employee satisfaction, higher levels of productivity, and lower health care costs.
- Arkansas' largest employer, state government, has a vital interest in the health of its workers.
- When state agencies set the example for employee wellness, it can lead to commercial business promotion of employee health in other workplaces around the state.

Program

- The Arkansas Department of Health developed the pilot worksite wellness program, Healthy Employee Lifestyle Program, for employees in the Arkansas Department of Health and the Department of Human Services. It offered health risk appraisals, incentives, education, healthy eating and activity challenges, walking groups and changes to vending snacks.
- The state legislature created an attractive incentive by approving leave time for continuous participation in the program. Employees track healthy behavior changes using a point system and electronic database to become eligible for leave time.
- Approximately one fourth of employees in the two agencies registered as participants in the incentive component.

Impact

- Employee participants who registered in the incentive part of the program have improved personal health-related behaviors such as being more active, eating less fat, and eating more fruits and vegetables.
- All employees are benefiting from the health-related improvements in the work environment.
- Program success led Governor Mike Beebe to expand the program to all state agencies: "This effort means not only that our workforce will be healthier—they'll be more productive, too," Governor Mike Beebe said. "This is a truly progressive program, and will pay us benefits for years to come in our state."
- The Department of Health is working with the state's Employee Benefits Division to create a system for continuous documentation of the benefits to employee health and to state government as well as changes in employee-related health care expenditures by the state. They are also providing technical assistance to agencies in establishing the program.

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