

# SHIP and Worksites

## *Working to reduce chronic disease in Minnesota*

During the past decade, employee health improvement efforts in the workplace have spread rapidly. About 80 percent of all employers with 50 or more employees now offer some form of health promotion effort.

### The Role of Worksites in the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP)

A coordinated approach from all sectors of the community is needed as the SHIP initiative works to improve the health of all Minnesotans. Businesses and worksites are a vital part of these efforts and are uniquely situated to support healthy behavior among their employees.

### What is Worksite Wellness?

A worksite wellness effort is an organized approach to making the work environment, policies and programs support employee health and encourage positive lifestyle behaviors such as increased physical activity, improved healthy eating, smoking cessation services, reduced tobacco exposure and reduced stress. Worksite wellness is fast growing because many preventable health risks can be addressed at the workplace and thereby improve employee productivity.<sup>1</sup>

A comprehensive worksite wellness effort strives to reach all employees, from those who are healthy to those who are sick. While 5 percent of employees account for 80 percent of health care costs, the individuals who populate this expensive bracket change over time. Therefore, while it is important to support those who are very ill, it is also important to keep healthy individuals healthy.<sup>2</sup>

### The Current Situation

Employees spend approximately 36 percent of their total waking hours at work. Technology has created more desk jobs and fewer active ones. Larger proportions of our population are in the workforce, leaving less time at home to be active with children and prepare nutritious meals. Convenience foods have become a staple in the workplace as they have at home. The use of stairs in our worksites is often limited because they are often difficult to find or do not provide easy access to destinations, and signage often leads to the elevator. Additionally, our sprawling communities and complicated lives make it difficult for employees to walk or bike to work.

### ***There is a high cost to not taking action:***

- Obesity and morbid obesity are associated with increased rates of work absenteeism, costing the U.S. an estimated \$4.3 billion per year.<sup>3</sup>
- Nationally, productivity gains of \$254 billion could be realized by reductions in obesity alone.<sup>4</sup>
- Minnesota loses \$2.6 billion annually from health care expenditures and lost productivity caused by tobacco-related illnesses. In 2000 an estimated \$495 million was spent in Minnesota treating diseases and conditions that would be avoided if all Minnesotan adults were physically active.<sup>5</sup>
- On average, smokers are absent from work 50 percent more often than nonsmokers.<sup>6</sup>

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### Is Worksite Wellness Effective?

Comprehensive worksite wellness efforts have been found to be effective in improving employee health risks (e.g. being overweight, lack of physical activity, poor food choices, tobacco exposure and use, stress and alcohol). These changes are typically seen within six to 12 months,<sup>7</sup> yielding a more than 25 percent reduction in sick leave, health plan, workers' compensation and disability costs. Worksite health promotion represents one of the most significant strategies for enhancing productivity of American workers.<sup>8</sup>

### Benefits of Worksite Wellness Programs

Wellness programs are associated with:

- Reduced health care costs
- Increased productivity
- Lower absenteeism
- Improved recruitment and retention
- Improved employee health and morale

A worksite wellness effort can help employers manage the cost of health care, benefits and insurance by providing a positive return on investment (ROI). The annual ROI for worksite wellness programs has been \$3 to \$6 saved for every \$1 spent, or a ROI of 3-6:1.<sup>9</sup>

### Examples of SHIP Interventions for Worksites

- Support increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and other nutritious foods through food service, catering options, healthy vending and access to community supported agriculture.
- Implement a comprehensive employee wellness initiative.
- Provide private rooms for breast milk pumping and refrigerated storage.
- Implement a tobacco-free campus policy.
- Offer access to smoking cessation services.
- Encourage walking or biking to work.

For more information, visit [www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship](http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship)

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