

MASSACHUSETTS WORKING ON WELLNESS: MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY WORK

Chapter 224 allocates up to 10% of the Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund (PWTF) to support increased adoption of workplace wellness programs. Working on Wellness was created to help businesses implement comprehensive wellness initiatives that enable employees to engage in healthy behaviors and in the long-term help reduce healthcare costs.

Figure 1: Description of Program Model



Working on Wellness provides training, technical assistance and seed funding to Massachusetts employers to initiate health-promoting policies, environmental supports, and behavior change programs for employees, by teaching the skills to plan and implement a comprehensive wellness initiative. The educational content is based on worksite health promotion best practices and follows a six-step program development cycle (Figure 1).

Over the course of the ten-month program, participating organizations complete two online learning modules for each step of the program development cycle, and receive additional support through live technical assistance calls, blogs, expert series webinars, and other tools and worksheets for each step. Organizations receive between \$5,000 and \$10,000 in seed funding to support their wellness program; the amount varies based on the quality and scope of the planned interventions.





Recruitment At-A-Glance	
	200 Partner Organizations
	56,000 Reach
	70 Webinars
	760 Attendees
	33 Meetings
	850 Attendees
	1,050 Tweets
	123,000 Social Media Impressions

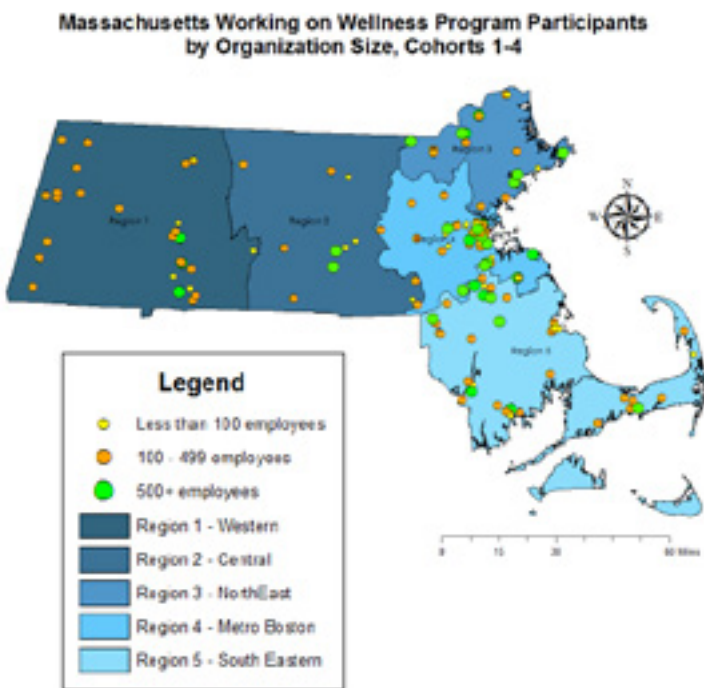
Figure 2: Recruitment efforts

By implementing a comprehensive wellness initiative, 25 employers participating in Working on Wellness are now eligible to apply for the MA small business tax credit, which covers up to 25% of the costs of wellness program implementation (max of \$10,000). In 2014 (before Working on Wellness launched), there were a total of 27 approved applications for the small business wellness tax credit.

Program Reach

Working on Wellness has achieved the goal of expanding the number of employers offering comprehensive worksite wellness initiatives. Extensive outreach was conducted using various marketing channels to recruit employers (Figure 2). Representing all regions of the state (Figure 3), 165 employers are actively participating in Working on Wellness, impacting nearly 72,000 employees, 21% of which are lower wage workers.¹ (Figure 4)

The majority of employers were from the non-profit sector and the most common industries included education, public administration, manufacturing, and healthcare and social assistance, which is fairly representative of the overall MA workforce.² DPH prioritized recruiting businesses with less than 200 employees, as these organizations are less likely to offer wellness initiatives. Half (51%) of the organizations in Working on Wellness have 200 employees or less.



*Program participants on this map represent sites that are active as of September 30, 2016.

Figure 3: Working on Wellness Program Participants by Organization Size



Figure 4: Program Reach

Asian Task Force for Domestic Violence

Asian Task Force for Domestic Violence (ATASK) is an 11-person Boston-based non-profit organization that serves Asian families and individuals in Massachusetts and New England who suffer from or are at risk of suffering from domestic violence. Through Working on Wellness, ATASK learned that 19% of its staff are obese, 23% report not engaging in enough physical activity, and 90% have high levels of stress. To address this, ATASK developed a comprehensive program to support increased physical activity, team building, and community engagement. One example is creating a team to compete in the Dragon Boat Festival race. ATASK sponsored a team made up of community members and staff, and won a Silver Medal in their division. Participants have reported positive feedback about the team: “Because of the wellness program, our staff has become more active on a regular basis and there is more communication between the different sites, which promotes a collective feeling.”



Program Impact

DPH worked with the University of Massachusetts Medical School and University of Massachusetts Lowell to conduct the evaluation of Working on Wellness. Please refer to Appendix B for their discussion. This section highlights key impacts of the program.

Working on Wellness has achieved the following:

- Increased by 165 the number of MA employers offering comprehensive worksite wellness initiatives, including the establishment of the internal infrastructure of executive sponsor, initiative leader, and employee wellness committee, and the development of strategic plans and budgets for their worksite wellness initiatives.
- Increased by 72,000 the number of MA employees with access to comprehensive worksite wellness initiatives.
- Increased the number of workplace policies and environmental supports that impact the health and well-being of employees, including flextime, paid time for physical activity or attending wellness programs, on-site gyms, tobacco-free grounds, stretch breaks in meetings, and healthy meetings policy.
- Leveraged existing community investments in 27 PWTF and/or Mass in Motion communities, with 86 employer organizations participating, touching over 33,000 employees, including 10 PWTF partner organizations.
- Expanded program reach beyond enrolled participants by developing tools and resources available to all employers, not just program participants, including the Healthy Workplace Toolbox and the Expert Webinar Series.

Limitations

Capacity Building: Effective infrastructure development is the foundation for successful implementation of comprehensive systems change, and this infrastructure development simply takes time. Recruitment began in August 2015, so there has only been one year of program implementation which limits the ability to demonstrate impact on health cost savings or improvements in health outcomes.

Recruitment: The target was 350 MA employers; 207 applied, 203 were accepted, and 165 are actively engaged. Organizations with a centralized human resources function were more likely to enroll; as such, certain industries (e.g., retail, food service, construction) are underrepresented. Additionally, lower wage workers make up 21% of employees in Working on Wellness, but represent 29% of the workforce in MA.³

Retention: Of the 207 organizations that applied, 203 were accepted into the program, and 38 dropped out. Reasons for attrition included failure to secure commitment from senior leadership, competing organizational priorities, or the program required too much time and effort. This attrition is consistent with published barriers related to insufficient staff resources and organizational instability.

“The work of the agency is client-centered, but the wellness program is adding a much needed perspective on staff health and wellness. As evaluation continues, we expect to see increases in interdepartmental staff communication and productivity, both of which will forward our overall agency mission and vision.”

Harbor Health Services, Inc.

Harbor Health Services, Inc. (HHSI) provides comprehensive healthcare in Boston, the South Shore, and Cape Cod. It also participates in the PWTF Grantee Program. Through Working on Wellness, HHSI identified that only 18% of its 190 staff in the Dorchester and Mattapan locations consumed the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and 45% expressed interest in having a farmer’s market on site. HHSI partnered with The Fresh Truck, a mobile fruit and vegetable market, to come to three HHSI locations every week. Employees received coupons for \$5 off a \$10 purchase to promote participation. Early success – 73% of employee shoppers report eating more fruits and vegetables because of the program – prompted HHSI to expand the initiative. HHSI is actively promoting The Fresh Truck with local businesses and public housing developments, thereby broadening fresh fruit and vegetable access in the community. “My family is eating more fruits and vegetable since I started shopping at The Fresh Truck. I look forward to trying something new each week. The quality is excellent and a good value for money. I hope the program continues. Thanks WoW team!”



Town of Fairhaven

The Town of Fairhaven employs 494 people across diverse job types, and the wellness committee includes representation from all Town departments. During Working on Wellness, the Town learned that 32% of employees were not meeting daily physical activity recommendations and 54% of employees were interested in getting more physically active.

The Wellness Committee developed a multi-phase approach to helping employees increase physical activity. The Committee organized an intermural kick ball tournament for town departments, which is being expanded to local businesses. A Health Fair provided employees with information about various wellness resources. The Town is developing a policy allowing a five-minute activity break during any organized meeting lasting over an hour. The Wellness Committee also made recommendations to the Town for enhancements to its bike paths with mile markers, exercise stations, and instructional signage. Bike path upgrades require collaboration across many Fairhaven Departments and will ultimately benefit the broader community.



Sustainability

Occupation is an important social determinant of health. Poor working conditions such as stress, low autonomy, and exposure to workplace hazards can lead to illness and injury. Conversely, safe and healthy working conditions lead to more productive employees, reduced absenteeism, reduced rates of injuries, and improved employee health. Certain populations, including lower-wage workers, are more likely to be exposed to unsafe working conditions. With this context, the Prevention and Wellness Advisory Board recommends a shift in the worksite wellness component of PWTF.

Overall Recommendations

Adopt a Total Worker Health (TWH) Model: TWH, launched by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), integrates worksite health promotion activities with occupational safety and health. Increasing evidence shows that TWH efforts can improve program effectiveness and participation, with potential for greater health impacts and increased sustainability.

Integrate worksite wellness into PWTF grantee program: Ten grantee partners enrolled in Working on Wellness, and the partnerships themselves played an important role in recruitment of local businesses, but there has been limited opportunity for collaboration beyond that. Better integration of worksite wellness into the work of the grantees may improve program participation, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Move toward policy and systems-level changes:

Intervention planning at the organizational level should continue to focus on policy changes for a more sustainable program that reaches more employees. Additionally, DPH should examine broad systems-level approaches to surveillance, needs assessment, and technical assistance that place less burden on the individual employer.

Focus efforts on lower wage workers: Providing a healthy and safe working environment for lower-wage workers and other vulnerable populations is an important step in eliminating work-related health disparities.

Recommendations for DPH

DPH should identify which industries employ the highest percentage of lower-wage workers by comparing multiple existing datasets. This information will:

- Inform the development of industry- or condition-specific interventions, which could be piloted by local employer organizations.
- Help employers tailor existing worksite wellness initiatives to meet the needs of their lower-wage employees, and those in racial and ethnic minority groups.

DPH should also develop an “Employment Profile” to help local organizations incorporate occupation and employment data into the local assessment of the health and needs of a specific community.

“The enthusiasm of the Wellness Committee has been our greatest success. Despite the fact that we are all strapped for time, people are excited about it, and it’s contagious. Our entire staff talks about BeWell and seems to have a greater awareness about making healthy choices for lunch and getting walks or breaks in during the day, even if these behaviors aren’t part of a formal intervention. Employees seem more comfortable talking about wellness, talking about how they are feeling, and taking initiative to make small changes that suit them. Our leadership is supportive of our work.”

Recommendation for Local Organizations/ Community Partners

Surveillance

Local organizations should incorporate work/employment into the assessment of local health needs using the “Employment Profile” developed by DPH. This will help identify at-risk workers and work-related health issues, and help set priorities for addressing the unique needs of the workforce in each community.

Worksite Wellness Program Models

- With support from DPH, local organizations should implement TWH interventions that align with PWTF priority conditions, e.g., a school-based intervention for pediatric asthma can be expanded to include integrated pest management practices and a ban on certain cleaners, which would improve outcomes for staff as well.
- Community partners should see themselves as employers who can provide a safe and healthy working environment for their employees. Future PWTF partners could go through the current Working on Wellness program, which has been shown to work well for similar types of organizations.
- CHWs should be trained to address occupational health and safety concerns, both as they arise with their clients and in their own place of employment.

Recommendation for Healthcare Providers and Payers

Healthcare providers and payers should capture occupation and/or industry in electronic health records (EHRs). This will improve surveillance and enhance our understanding of how work impacts health. It can also improve clinical care, giving providers a broader understanding of the association between occupation and disease/disease outcomes; it also presents an opportunity to pilot clinical decision support tools tailored for occupational considerations.

Recommendation for Employees

Employees, worker centers, and unions should be viewed as key partners in promoting healthy and safe worksites. These groups are the voice of the working population and bring different ideas and perspectives to the design and implementation of wellness programs. Their involvement is essential program for buy-in, impact, and sustainability.

REFERENCES

1. Lower wage workers are defined as those earning \$13.50 or less per hour (150% of the Massachusetts minimum wage)
2. MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Employment and Job Statistics <http://www.mass.gov/lwd/economic-data/employment-jobs/>
3. [http://www.massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=State_and%20Local_Impact_of_Raising_MW%20_to_\\$15_in_MA.html](http://www.massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=State_and%20Local_Impact_of_Raising_MW%20_to_$15_in_MA.html)