

Focus on Weight Management and Nutrition

Following a healthful eating plan not only provides the nutrients needed for robust health, development, and growth, but also helps the individual achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. And yet, despite USDA Food Pyramid recommendations and a national obsession with body weight, fewer than one-third of all American adults are at a healthy body weight, defined as having a Body Mass Index (BMI) lower than 25.³⁸

The consequences of poor nutrition and obesity in the United States not only lowers the quality of life for individuals, but also reduces productivity and increases the cost of doing business. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates the direct and indirect costs associated with obesity to be \$147 billion per year in the United States.³⁹

Ideas for Small/Medium-Sized Employers

- Sponsor and promote both individual and team weight-loss competitions that integrate appropriate education, skills, and behavioral supports.
- Consider providing financial incentives and/or merchandise to employees reaching and/or maintaining a weight-loss goal.
- Promote community amenities conducive to physical activity such as cycling lanes/routes, local parks, and hiking trails.
- Provide free or subsidized weight management programs through health plans.
- Provide educational materials, skills, and behavioral support pertinent to healthful eating, weight management, and the importance of daily physical activity.
- Promote/sponsor healthy food shopping tours and farmers' markets.
- Provide signage in vending and meeting areas that encourage intake of fruits and vegetables (five or more servings per day).
- Provide healthy, low-fat, low-sugar options in company vending machines.
- Encourage/support healthy pot-luck lunches (e.g., every Friday) prepared by employees. Sponsor healthy cooking classes.
- Provide fruits and vegetable snacks/low-fat dips and low-sugar beverage options during company meetings.
- Provide nutritious meal options for company-sponsored events.



Carol Aichele
Chair, Chester County Commissioners

County of Chester, Pennsylvania Chester County Employee Wellness Program

Company Overview

- Local government
- Chester County, Pennsylvania
- 2,500 employees

Program Components

- Backed by the Chester County Board of Commissioners, led by the human resources and health departments, and coordinated by representatives from more than 45 departments in Chester County government.
- Aligned with Chester County Commissioners' strategic goals for staff and Chester County citizens.
- Emphasizes increased knowledge about nutrition, exercise, disease prevention, and healthy lifestyles and an increase in positive health behaviors.
- Includes onsite educational and physical activity programs, individual health risk screenings, onsite smoking cessation program, *Weight Watchers® at Work* and summer *Growers' Market*.
- Includes participation incentive program—collected “puzzle pieces” of four cornerstones of wellness program for accumulated hours of vacation time.

Program Success Story

- In 2008 and 2009, more than 130 activities provided to employees, reaching an average 5,000 participants.
- *Growers' Market* summer program expanded from two sites in 2008 to four in 2009. Further expanded to employees and the public in 2010.
- *Losing it at Chester County* employee weight-loss program registered 250 participants resulting in more than 1,400 lbs. lost in 12 weeks.
- Program has received awards from the *Philadelphia Business Journal* and the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Chairman's Statement

“Our plan in developing this program was to motivate Chester County staff to make changes for the better—benefiting individuals and the county—and become a positive example for county companies that hadn't recognized that a focus on the health of their staff benefits all. In just over two years, the program has grown in popularity and participation, and has received accolades from regional and national organizations.”

