

Worksites Need to Know How to Get Started.

To The Editors:

We congratulate the *NC Medical Journal* for addressing the important public health issue of worksite health promotion in the November/December 2006 issue. Many employers and policymakers are seeking solutions to the rising cost of healthcare and in so doing, turn to worksite wellness. Oftentimes, they wade into these waters without an understanding of what works, what resources exist, what to measure, what is considered a success, or how to even begin.



NC Prevention Partners has made the strategic decision to address worksite health promotion because it is an important way to significantly improve the health of North Carolinians. While the Healthy People 2010 goal is for 75% of businesses to establish a comprehensive worksite health promotion program, only 6.9% nationwide have done so. The majority of NC employers are not actively engaging in health promotion efforts because they simply do not know where to start.

Many of the tools and training opportunities developed by NC Prevention Partners focus on implementing policies and creating environments that can significantly influence the behavior of all employees, regardless of their health status. Establishing a solid foundation of supportive policies and environments can help keep healthy people healthy and can help reduce health risks in persons with existing disease conditions.

For the business community, the problem—rising healthcare costs—is clear, but the solutions are not. We recommend the following quick-start, low-cost, high-return health promotion strategies as the place to start.

- **Start with a prevention audit.**

NC Prevention Partners has created a web-based Prevention Audit as part of the *Prevention 1st Challenge* (www.preventionfirstchallenge.com). The audit helps employers take a critical look at their policies and environments, and take steps to create healthy worksites.

- **Make it convenient to choose healthful options at work.**

In Orange County, businesses participating in the Prevention 1st Challenge are making healthy snacks available in vending machines and starting walking groups. NC Prevention Partners established a worksite policy making healthy options like fresh fruit and spring water available onsite and more convenient than the soda and snack machines down the hall. For other strategies, visit www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com.

- **Go 100% tobacco-free campus wide.**

Hospitals in North Carolina are making significant changes to eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke through the *Healthy Hospital Initiative*, a partnership between NC Prevention Partners, the NC Hospital Association and The Duke Endowment. With tools and support, North Carolina hospitals are leading the nation in establishing 100% tobacco-free campus wide policies. For more information on reducing secondhand smoke in the workplace, visit www.healthyhospital.org and www.fammed.unc.edu/enter/.

- **Purchase benefits that give employees access to proven preventive care.**

A new publication, *A Purchaser's Guide to Clinical Preventive Services: Moving Science into Coverage*, from the National Business Group on Health (www.businessgrouphealth.org) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is an excellent tool to help businesses purchase proven preventive benefits. In addition, NC Prevention Partners' Preventive Benefits Watch (www.ncpreventionpartners.org/preventivebenefits) is a web-based resource that provides policymakers and businesses the opportunity to learn about preventive benefits offered by North Carolina insurers. Using this tool can assure businesses that they are purchasing the best prevention coverage, which should be actively promoted to their employees.

- **Businesses can learn more at the April or November 2007 NC Prevention Institutes (www.ncpreventionpartners.org).**

- Complete a Prevention Audit and begin to create healthy policies and environments.
- Gain insight about what works from the National Business Group on Health and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.



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