

Worksite Physical Activity Success Story: Mississippi

Making Impactful Changes with an Eye Toward the Future



WORKSITE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN MISSISSIPPI: OVERVIEW

Obesity and obesity-related illnesses are arguably the biggest public health crises facing Mississippi, which now has the highest adult obesity rate in the nation at 35.1 percent.¹ This is a significant increase in the state's obesity rate; in 1990, the rate was only 15 percent. Further, 36 percent of adults in Mississippi do not participate in regular physical activity, with only 40 percent meeting the standard of 150 minutes per week.²

State legislators in Mississippi decided to proactively address the obesity crisis by improving worksite wellness for state employees, resulting in the State Employee Wellness Program.

In 2010, Mississippi enacted state legislation that required all state agencies (n=95) to participate in worksite wellness. Using the CDC Workplace Health Promotion Model³, agencies were provided instructions and tools to implement a wellness plan, including strategies to increase employees' physical fitness.

With the help of the Workplace Health Promotion Model as a guide, participating agencies in Mississippi identified staff champions

for wellness and physical activities. Agencies have participated in a number of worksite physical activity initiatives, including walking and fitness challenges.

This success story will focus specifically on the work being done by employees within the Department of Health (DOH) Office of Preventive Health, which oversees worksite wellness implementation within the entire DOH. Information shared by the Mississippi Gaming Commission and the Library Commission is also included.

With the help of motivated wellness champions and leaders, as well as enthusiastic staff who are eager to improve their health and fitness, Mississippi will continue to build on the momentum of their current success by rolling out additional evidence based strategies to bring worksite physical activity to more people in Mississippi agencies.

SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

STATE POLICY

Mississippi Senate Bill 2646 is a 2010 act that authorizes the creation of a model state employee wellness program, including a designated statewide Wellness Coordinator at the Mississippi State DOH and the development of a wellness council at each participating state agency.⁴ Though funding is not provided as part of the mandate, all agencies receive relevant technical

¹ <http://stateofobesity.org/states/ms/>

² http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/pa_state_indicator_report_2014.pdf

³ [CDC Workplace Health Promotion Model Training](#)

⁴ [Mississippi State Agencies Employee Wellness Programs](#)

assistance and training—in fact, wellness champions participate in quarterly trainings and webinars, and are asked to participate in monitoring and evaluation plans. Agencies implement their strategies using the CDC Workplace Health Promotion Model, providing a framework for worksite wellness strategic plan development, engagement methods, measurement and evaluation, and strategies for the application of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC's) Promising Practices.⁵ Evaluation data is collected annually via the [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#). Information is organized and disseminated by onsite champions.

The requisite wellness champion is responsible for convening their worksite committee-- comprised of staff volunteers--and wellness plans for their agencies. Wellness plans are reviewed by the Division Director for Worksite Wellness within the Mississippi State DOH Office of Preventive Health before being sent to the CDC.

Lastly, the mandate encourages employees to participate in two to three hours of worksite wellness activities per month.

MOTIVATING MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi's State and School Employees Health Insurance Plan's wellness and preventative health program, "Motivating Mississippi-Keys to Living Healthy,"⁶ is part of the insurance package offered to all state employees. The program is administered through ActiveHealth Management (AHS).

To implement the Motivating Mississippi program, AHS employs onsite wellness coaches that provide resources and learning opportunities. They also offer digital coaching, weight management programs, and onsite wellness coaching.

USER PERSPECTIVE

Some Mississippi agencies are encouraging their employees to move regularly in a number of creative ways.

WALKING CHALLENGE

The Mississippi State DOH partnered with 5 Points Benefits, Inc., based in Tennessee, who provided pedometers to 50 employees within the health department. Department of Health employees used the pedometers to participate in an eight-week walking challenge in an effort to increase their overall steps and encourage more movement throughout the day. Though it was a relatively short amount of time, one interviewee indicated that they noticed positive change in employee behavior even after the challenge was over.

"[By] the end of the challenge, I started noticing some results [that] I did not anticipate. Employees had taken it upon themselves [to utilize] the walking paths more frequently on their 15-minute breaks."

An additional walking challenge had an even larger reach. The program targeted seven state agencies with a total of 150 participants. Each participating agency received training on basic components of physical activity prior to the October 20th start date. Weekly lifestyle and condition management educational tools were also provided to the agencies. Three of the seven targeted agencies completed pre- and post-biometric screenings for blood pressure and weight. At the end of the challenge data showed that the program resulted in a 3 percent reduction in weight, a total of 154 pounds lost, and a 4 percent reduction in systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

FITNESS CHALLENGES

In fall 2014, employees at Mississippi's Gaming Commission participated in a fitness challenge that was open to everyone in their agency. Those who wished to participate were asked to first undergo an eight-week training period, requiring participants to dedicate their time outside of work to the challenge.

A total of 45 gaming commission employees committed to and participated in the group challenge which included running and various strength activities.

"It was a great time in which [. . .] people really liked the camaraderie and it promoted a wellness culture in the agency.."

Due to the success of the fall challenge, a similar challenge was repeated in the spring. User feedback was incorporated in the spring challenge, including making the challenge easier and more accessible to a larger audience. Additionally the strength training portion was modified and the running was decreased.

FITNESS EQUIPMENT

The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) received funding from the Mississippi Beverage Association to create an onsite gym facility for their employees. Employees were able to take advantage of the gym on their breaks, during their lunch hour, and before and after business hours.

⁵ [CDC's Promising Practices](#)

⁶ <http://knowyourbenefits.dfa.state.ms.us/MotivatingMississippi.html>



Some Mississippi wellness leaders are building relationships with local gyms. Specifically, some state agencies have developed agreements with gyms such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) or Anytime Fitness to receive discounts. An example of a discount is a 10 percent decrease in the monthly rate and the waiving of the process fee. Efforts are underway to centralize discounts for all state agencies.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Worksite physical activity is implemented in informal ways as well. Some agencies capitalize on monthly "lunch and learns" by bringing in a yoga or kickboxing instructor to lead classes free of charge. Other agencies organize group 5K walks/runs.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

PARTNERING WITH HUMAN RESOURCES

Many, if not most, of Mississippi's wellness champions are human resources (HR) employees. Since HR employees receive an inconsistent amount of training on health wellness and promotion, it is recognized as an important training opportunity for the DOH. Efforts are being made to strengthen the relationship between the personnel board and DOH in hopes to provide HR managers information about the State Employee Wellness Program at their trainings. To accomplish this, a reputable wellness leader attended three HR trainings provided by the state personnel board, and intends to continue to foster the relationship in the future.

USING DATA TO ENACT CHANGE

In 2014, the University of Mississippi conducted an evaluation of the state worksite wellness mandate. Participants included state employees, wellness champions, and agency directors and leadership. The evaluation was intended to help wellness leaders within the DOH understand which approaches were effective and which ones

could be improved.

The survey found that among state employees:

- Over 30% indicated that they rarely participate in wellness activities at their workplace;
- Greater than 40% contributed non-participation in wellness activities at their workplace to lack of time; and
- Over 90% identified that the type of employee wellness activities they would like to participate in is physical activity/exercise.



Wellness leaders within the DOH intend to use this data to help inform the future structure of worksite wellness in Mississippi. For example, efforts are being made to engage leaders from all agencies to support and promote state employee health.

CLUSTER GROUPS

Another potential future direction for Mississippi's worksite wellness initiative is the use of cluster groups, including partnering organizations that are located close to each other (e.g., all state agency buildings located in Jackson) to coordinate physical activity with one another. Cluster groups are becoming increasingly popular in Jackson; for example, state legislators recently gathered nearby agencies in the city for "Shape Up at the Capitol," a four-hour event featuring different exercise routines for participants every 30 minutes.

Cross-agency collaboration is seen as likely to boost morale, increasing a sense of friendly competition while also providing opportunities to forge new relationships.

FACILITATORS & BARRIERS

FACILITATORS

State Mandate

The state mandate has provided the structure, tools, and resources for state agencies to enact workplace wellness and physical fitness programs

within their organizations. It also provides for ongoing collaboration for both the State Employee Wellness Program and the Motivating Mississippi program to educate employees on health and fitness related resources.

Motivated Leaders

Employees at the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity team and other leadership staff at the DOH are motivated and optimistic about the future of worksite physical activity in the state. Additionally, some wellness champions have been working particularly hard to bring worksite physical activity to their organization, seeking opportunities through AHS and the motivation and interests of their staff.

External Collaborations

Mississippi has been able to collaborate with organizations such as the Mississippi Business Group on Health and 5 Points Benefits, Inc. to help facilitate physical activity projects. These partnerships allow for fresh perspectives and tend to boost staff morale.

BARRIERS

Inconsistency

Some state agencies are more invested in worksite physical activity than others, based on their worksite wellness champion and the organizational structure/staff buy-in. Since there isn't significant oversight for the worksite wellness mandate, there has been inconsistency from agency to agency in terms of participation.

Workplace Culture

Sustainable worksite physical activity success is largely contingent on a supportive culture, including both leadership and staff buy-in. One interviewee explained that though they were eager to find opportunities to exercise in the workplace, they didn't feel that their coworkers would be interested in participating.

Staff Turnover

The wellness champion position has seen significant turnover, another barrier within establishing a workplace culture for physical activity. In order to create and sustain a culture of wellness and physical activity, an interviewee explained that it is helpful to have a consistent champion that understands the history and culture of the organization leading the charge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interviewees were asked to share recommendations they had for organizations hoping to implement similar worksite physical activity initiatives, including the following.

- Focus on small changes first.
- Ensure that events accommodate all levels of users (those new to fitness and those that are already physically fit).
- Avoid discouragement as a result of low participation.
- Work with what you have (e.g., the Gaming Commission identified a half-mile walking path outside of the building for employees to take advantage of during breaks).
- Centralize resources for agencies to create onsite fitness centers, onsite physical activities, and listings of local resources.
- Train supervisors and leaders on how to support and promote physical activities in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Mississippi state agencies have been implementing physical activity in a number of creative ways. Though implementation of the statewide mandate varies across the state, there are new evidence-based strategies on the horizon. Through the combined efforts of wellness champions, leadership, state-provided technical assistance, and motivated employees, Mississippi has and will continue to embrace physical activity in the workplace in exciting, innovative ways.

For more information on worksite physical activity in Mississippi's Department of Health please contact:

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