Maine State Government's Worksite Wellness Program

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Maine – State Employee Wellness Initiatives

Wellness – History

As an employer, Maine State Government is no stranger to employee wellness or health promotion. During the 1980’s, the Employee Health Division in the Bureau of Human Resources employed health educators to deliver worksite based health education and biometric screenings. Unfortunately, due to the budget cuts of the early 1990’s, this program and its personnel were eliminated.

In 1997, in response to a legislative commission studying state employee worker’s compensation, the duties and responsibilities of the existing Director of Employee Health position were expanded to include employee occupational health and safety. The position was also relocated from within Human Resources to the bureau’s Division of Employee Health and Benefits. The Division of Employee Health and Benefits is responsible for health and dental benefits, all voluntary benefits, safety, worksite wellness and worker’s compensation.

A Governor’s initiative at the time required each department to establish a labor/management committee on employee health and safety. To help get these committees established and operational, each department was given access to a small $3,500 annual grant from the State’s Worker’s Compensation Unit for safety related programming, committee training, etc.

In 1999, the trustees of the state employee health insurance program (State Employee Health Commission, SEHC) went out to bid for the state employee health insurance. The SEHC included in the RFP a section requiring bidders to address the topic of worksite wellness or health promotion. As part of their bid proposal, Maine BC/BS, the selected vendor, agreed to provide the equivalent of 1 FTE to assist the state with the development of an employee focused worksite wellness program. This began the State’s current efforts to address employee wellness or health promotion through the worksite.

The State’s Director of Employee Health and Safety and the Maine BC/BS Health Promotion Specialist began meeting to review existing data sources. The data sources consulted included:

- Health insurance claims and utilization data
- State employee worker’s compensation data
- Topical health and disease state studies and research reports that had been conducted using state employee health insurance claims data
- Data available from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Bureau of Health
At the time, although there was no integrated or coordinated system for the delivery of programming or resources for employee wellness or health improvement, some departments and employee interest groups had begun independently working on employee wellness programming. Each existing departmental health and safety committee was approached and asked to consider taking on the responsibility for worksite based employee health and wellness programs. As an incentive to do this, committees were authorized to use up to one-half of their annual operational grant to support worksite based employee wellness activities and programming.

This approach resulted in three different wellness committee models evolving at the departmental level:

1. The existing health and safety committee took on the added responsibility for employee wellness.
2. The existing health and safety committee created a permanent subcommittee that focused solely on employee wellness.
3. The existing health and safety committee declined to add employee wellness to its responsibilities. This usually led to the creation of a separate and independent department employee wellness committee.

With the existing data analyzed and the infrastructure assessed, the Division of Employee Health and Benefits and Maine BC/BS put forth a Worksite Health Improvement Plan in November of 2000. Since the employee health improvement program would have neither a program budget nor dedicated staff, the plan called for the use of volunteer worksite wellness coordinators within each department.

It was hoped that these worksite champions or sparkplugs would generate enthusiasm at the departmental level, while the Division of Employee Health and Benefits, in partnership with Maine BC/BS would continue to focus at the macro level. The initial volunteer coordinators were either self identified interested employees or employees recruited by the departmental health and safety or wellness committees. Subsequent volunteer recruitment has been by word of mouth or through departmental senior managers.

The data analysis suggested the State’s employee wellness programs should initially focus on:

- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular disease
- Cancer screening
- Physical activity

Maine BC/BS and the Division of Employee Health and Benefits jointly developed volunteer coordinator training programs and program manuals in each of the above areas for use by the coordinators. Program manuals included ready to implement activities at the awareness, educational and behavior change levels of
worksite health improvement. In 2004, the training and manual offerings were expanded to include tobacco cessation.

In addition to the use of volunteer worksite coordinators, Maine has continually sought to bring health promotion or wellness programming to worksites by being willing to serve as either a research or pilot site. Partners to date include: Maine BC/BS (now Anthem BC/BS), MaineGeneral Medical Center, Healthe Tech from Boulder, Colorado, Maine Medical Care Development, Pfizer Corporation and Tufts – New England Medical Center from Boston.

During 2001, the Director of the Bureau of Human Resources and staff from the Division of Employee Health and Benefits met with the senior management team in each Executive Branch department to review the department’s human resources, worker’s compensation and health utilization data. In addition to reviewing the data, each department was provided with a list of possible strategies to use to address any issues identified during the data analysis. As an outcome of this effort, annual health utilization (including preventive services) and worker’s compensation utilization reports are now made available to departmental Commissioners and other key personnel within the department.

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services’ Bureau of Health received a multi-year cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 2000. The development of a statewide worksite based CVD project was included as part of this grant award. A representative from Maine State Government serves as a member of the worksite project’s advisory board and the State’s largest office building, the Cross State Office Building (CSOB), served as a pilot site during the first year of the grant program.

The CSOB is a seven story office building that houses approximately 900 employees from several different Executive Branch departments, as well as some employees from the Legislative Branch. Under the leadership of the CSOB’s nurse (a position now vacant and frozen to rehire), along with an ad hoc committee of building employees, various awareness and education, as well as physical activity programs were created and implemented, including an exercise program utilizing one of the building’s stairwells.

In the late 1990’s, a group of state employees from the Augusta Mental Health Institute received permission from the hospital’s administration to begin using the patient gym during an expanded noon hour. This group was soon expanded to include other state employees who worked in state buildings located on the hospital’s grounds. The employees played basketball, utilized the weight and aerobics equipment and with the help of a small subsidy from the hospital, self funded classes led by an aerobics instructor contracted through a local gym.
When the Legislature approved the construction of a new psychiatric treatment facility, gym users approached the Director of Employee Health and Safety with concerns that the existing gym would be either mothballed or converted to other uses. The users’ concerns were shared with the Director of the Bureau of General Services and other senior managers in the Department of Administrative and Financial Services. In October of 2002, the outgoing administration requested the Division of Employee Health and Benefits study the gym issue and come up with a proposal for how to use the gymnasium to improve employee health status while using only existing revenue sources.

An ad hoc committee of users, departmental health and safety personnel, Bureau of General Services representatives and other interested persons was assembled to undertake the study. While the committee didn’t lack for programming ideas, funding the facility remained a key stumbling block. In the search for existing funds, the Coordinator of the State’s Worker’s Compensation Unit was approached.

Since 1996, The Maine State Government Worker’s Compensation Unit has been offering, through contract with an outside vendor, on site physical therapy to injured Augusta area state employees. When required as part of their treatment, injured employees were referred to local gyms for services not available through the on site physical and occupational therapists. When approached about the gym facility, the Coordinator of the State’s Worker’s Compensation Unit had the foresight to see the use of the gymnasium as an opportunity to offer expanded in-house services to injured employees, as well as an opportunity to further expand the injury prevention efforts of the State’s worker’s compensation program.

In June of 2004, the State’s Worker’s Compensation Unit took over operation of the gym facility. Following minimal remodeling, the Eastside Wellness Center opened in September 2004. As of December 2005, over 1500 state employees have registered to use the facility, with more than 100 employees using the facility on a daily basis.

By 2003, department level worksite wellness activities had grown to the point that in December, a Statewide Wellness Committee (H.E.L.P. Me- Healthy Employees Lifestyle Planning Committee) was established. Representatives from many Executive Branch state government agencies and a representative from the Judicial Branch participate in monthly forums to further enhance the health and wellness within their respective agencies. The goals established by this Committee are: to decrease chronic disease of State employees, reduce healthcare and Workers’ Compensation costs, and improve employee productivity.

As the largest employer in Maine, Maine State Government recognizes that it has a leadership role in the area of worksite wellness or health promotion. A
representative of Maine State Government is a founding member of both a regional and statewide worksite wellness council, as well as the Augusta area healthy community initiative.

Currently, the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) has one FTE devoted entirely to coordinate and direct health and wellness activities for their 2,300 member workforce. The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has one FTE devoted to health, safety and wellness efforts for their 4,000 member workforce. All other Executive Branch departments carry out their worksite wellness initiatives solely with the use of volunteers from the workforce.

**Current Health Improvement Initiatives**

**Health Insurance Preventive Benefits**

The Maine State Employee Health Insurance Program provides for preventive services consistent with the guidelines published by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. A sampling of covered benefits include: periodic routine physical examinations, varied laboratory tests, annual prostate specific antigen test, routine eye examinations for vision correction, routine gynecological examination which includes breast and pelvic exam and PAP smear and mammogram screening.

**Awareness and Education**

A number of different types of health education and awareness opportunities occur at the department level. This effort includes seminars, lunch and learns, health fairs, email campaigns and newsletter articles. The topics for these programs are often driven by our health utilization data or held in conjunction with national events listed in the National Health Observances Calendar.

Wellness Rooms, bulletin boards, and information centers have also been established at various State building locations. These allow employees access to wellness, health and safety related information, as well as provide a private place for blood pressure and weight monitoring and other wellness related activities.

As members of Anthem BC/BS, state employees and their family members can access the MyHealth@Anthem.com Website. At MyHealth, members can access health and disease information, visit resource centers, take mini-health assessments, as well as use a varied number of health related tools and calculators. By registering at the site, health plan members can access personalized information and services.
The Maine DOT holds annual health and safety days which include educational components of health and safety information, biometric screenings and other participatory events.

**Disability and Injury Prevention Services**

Maine state employees are fortunate that the State’s Workers’ Compensation Unit recognizes and supports the link between wellness and injury prevention. Injury and disability prevention are solid parts of the State’s workers’ compensation program.

The Injury and Disability Prevention Services consists of a number of components:

- A comprehensive Statewide Ergonomic Program
- Ergonomic training and education
- Departmental level ergonomic program audits
- A State sponsored Wellness Center in Augusta which also houses the contracted on site physical and occupational therapists

The State recognizes that a healthy and fit staff is less likely to be injured and if they are injured, they will generally experience a quicker rehabilitation period.

For a number of years now, computer use related ergonomic injuries have been the most frequent type of injury experienced by state employees, as well as the most costly type of injury during the first year of injury. Maine State Government adopted an ergonomics policy in 2000. Maine State Government’s workstation evaluation program, known as the Peer Evaluator Program, trains volunteer state employees to conduct workstation evaluations for their fellow non-injured state employees. All evaluations are done under the oversight of an occupational therapist. By conducting these evaluations in-house, rather than using a high cost outside contracted individual or service provider, the State saves significant dollars. Significant healthcare and worker’s compensation costs are also saved as well through preventing an injury in the first place. The Peer Evaluator Program is a proactive approach to decreasing costs and injuries.

Ergonomic related training and education classes are offered monthly in Augusta and on a rotating basis, in other cities across the state. A train-the-trainer program for ergonomics and video display terminal (VDT) users is currently in development. This complete training package will be handed off to the departments for delivery by a departmental level trainer.

Maine DOT recently conducted a limited pilot of a Web-based VDT/ergonomic training program. As a result of their positive experience, during the next contracting period for the Injury and Disability Prevention Program, the State’s Worker’s Compensation Unit hopes to establish a multi-department pilot to further test out the feasibility and efficacy of offering a Web based ergonomic/VDT training program to state employees.
Maine DOT has initiated a Peer Coaching Program for heavy equipment operators and truck drivers as another proactive approach to eliminating injuries through whole body vibration. Peers provide ergonomic evaluations for employees who operate equipment and drive trucks.

The Department of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the on-site occupational therapist, developed a stretching program for staff based on the injuries the occupational and physical therapists were seeing. This stretching program is currently being rolled out to all Maine State Government agencies. Specifically, Maine DOT encourages their maintenance crews to perform stretching exercises twice a day. Other agencies have incorporated stretching programs, along with staff education about the benefits of stretching.

For the driving public, Maine DOT has posted stretching signs at each of the ten rest areas along Interstate 95 in Maine.

**Health Risk Assessments**

Maine State Government is currently partnering with Anthem BC/BS and MaineGeneral Medical Center to offer health risk assessments at three pilot worksites in Augusta. The Health Risk Assessment and follow-up coaching/counseling are provided by a MaineGeneral Medical Center nurse. A unique component of this program is the linking of an employee found to need case management services, directly to a case manager at MaineGeneral Medical Center. The pilot is currently available to approximately 2,500 state employees based in the Augusta area.

In Aroostook County, a partnership between The Aroostook Medical Center (TAMC) and the Healthy Maine Partnerships located in Aroostook County provides Maine DOT employees with on-site Health Risk Assessments, follow-up, and two health educators who provide monthly physical activity and nutrition programs.

Maine DOT is also about to begin a pilot Phone Health Coach program for 20 employees selected randomly from throughout the department. This pilot will assist participating employees with lifestyle and/or disease management recommendations based upon their health assessment. Phone coaches will provide assistance and guidance for up to one year.

In conjunction with Anthem BC/BS, plans are currently underway to roll out a Web based health risk appraisal program to all state employees and members of their family beginning July 1, 2006.
Physical Activity Programs

Departments are encouraged to participate in the annual community initiatives such as March Into May through Portland Public Health, Move and Improve through Eastern Maine Medical Center and Commute Another Way Day. Annual coordinator training for March Into May and Move and Improve are made available to state departments in Augusta.

The Eastside Wellness Center in Augusta offers gym and aerobic programs as part of its services to state employees. The Center’s aerobic programs include step and floor aerobics, pilates and yoga. There are fitness coordinators on site to conduct individual assessments and to help employees develop a fitness program to meet their individual needs.

As part of the Eastside Wellness Center, there is a training room where health education programs, blood pressure screenings and other health improvement activities offered by fitness staff and healthcare professionals.

Pedometer programs have been instituted in several departments in conjunction with Anthem BC/BS and the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, Sports, Health and Wellness – Maine in Motion Program. Maine DOT purchased pedometers for all of their employees to increase their awareness of how to increase physical activity through their daily steps.

Selected Maine State Government worksites participated in the pilot testing of the Anthem Rewards program. Anthem Rewards is an incentive based program that rewards individuals for their on going participation in physical activities. Anthem Rewards became available to all state employees in June of 2005. The Anthem Rewards Web site also contains a lot of information on health related topics and nutrition planning. A web-based fitness trainer and Health Risk Assessment are also part of the Anthem site.

Walking trails and routes near a number of state employee worksites have been measured and mapped to show measured routes for staff to walk during their breaks and lunches. The State Planning Office and the Maine DOT have specifically developed trail and walking route booklets for their employees.

Maine DOT holds an annual fun run/walk with approximately 300 employees participating.

Nutrition

Work continues with vendors to provide healthier choices in vending machines located in State buildings.
The Director of Employee Health and Safety has been trained as a coordinator for the American Cancer Society’s “Meeting Well: A Tool for Planning Healthy Meetings and Events” program. Departments are encouraged to provide healthy choices during State related meetings.

Employees are part of the cafeteria advisory committee in the Cross State Office Building. These employees have worked with the vendor to include healthy options and heart healthy meals. Some work has also been started with the other State cafeterias to include healthy options and featured meals for the Five-a-Day Campaign and others.

**Flu Shots**

For several years now, Maine State Government has offered flu shots to state employees, their spouses and retirees at no charge. This program is administered by the Division of Employee Health and Benefits and delivered by the Public Health Nursing Program within the Bureau of Health, Maine Department of Health and Human Services. This year, public health nurses administered approximately 5,000 shots at over 75 state worksites across the state. This year’s worksites included five community college campuses, the Maine Maritime Academy and Maine Turnpike Authority facilities. An employee at each clinic site serves as a volunteer coordinator.

**Wellness – The Future**

Looking ahead, an immediate goal is to continue to look at ways that the efforts of employee wellness, employee safety, worker’s compensation and the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can be integrated to create a unified message and enhanced efficiencies.

In a Request for Proposal (RFP) just released by the Worker’s Compensation Unit, bidders are asked to provide models to the State as to how they see the successes of the Augusta based on-site physical therapy program and Injury and Disability Prevention Services program being replicated, on a pilot basis, in Bangor and Portland.

The staff of the Eastside Wellness Center has begun to bring some of their programs and services out to individual departments. The current plan calls for this effort to be expanded.

Create a stronger connection between the State’s disease management programs and the worksite wellness program.

Use Web based technologies to deliver awareness and educational wellness programs and volunteer worksite wellness coordinator training to employees from across the state.
The role employee wellness plays in the upcoming health insurance program RFP will hopefully be greatly expanded, based on the increase in employee wellness related activity since the last RFP.

Finally, stress and substance use and misuse remain significant issues facing state employees. There needs to be a concerted effort to incorporate these two topics into health, wellness, safety and EAP related activities.

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February, 2006