

# Healthier Wisconsin Worksite Initiative 2007 Summary Report

## Background / Summary

The epidemic of overweight and obesity in our Nation and in Wisconsin did not occur overnight and will not be eliminated overnight. Overweight and obesity is a multi-faceted issue, one that cannot be adequately addressed by any one program or intervention, therefore numerous partners must work together to address this issue.

In 2007, The National Governor's Association (NGA) awarded a grant to Wisconsin.

The grant was a collaborative effort of the Governor's Office, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), Nutrition and Physical Activity Program and the Office of State Employment Relations. Part of the grant was used to facilitate worksite wellness programs to reduce obesity through lifestyle changes.

Lifestyle factors such as nutrition and physical activity are of key importance because they contribute greatly to morbidity and mortality, yet are modifiable. The outreach grant objective resulted in the Healthier Wisconsin Worksite Initiative, which fostered partnerships between local coalitions and worksites. The project focused on a goal of the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan - creating environments that support healthy eating and being physically active in worksites. The grant provided 11 coalitions with funding to assist worksites to set-up wellness programs. These

11 nine-month grants provided local coalitions with funds to implement healthy behavior changes within local worksites using the proven strategies and methods contained in the *Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit*. Worksites were targeted because they are a relatively controlled environment where people spend much of their waking day. By changing policy and environmental factors, while also providing some programming for individuals, it was hoped that the

worksite changes would lead to healthier lifestyles centered on improved nutrition and increased physical activity.

The purpose of this summary is to describe the process and model used to promote healthier lifestyles.

The *Healthier Wisconsin Worksite Initiative* intended to:

- Create a working partnership between local coalitions and worksites interested in healthier employees.
- Provide a guide for coalitions and their worksite partners to follow by using the Worksite Wellness Resource Kit.
- Focus partner efforts on interventions that are practical, achievable, and realistic for reducing the burden of obesity, improving nutrition and increasing physical activity.
- Encourage policy and environmental changes that support healthy eating, physical activity and a healthy weight.

### SUMMARY:

**Objective** – To highlight the success of the Healthier Wisconsin Worksite Initiative projects in increasing physical activity and nutrition at worksites.

**Methods** – Data and feedback were gathered from eleven coalitions developing worksite wellness projects with local partners.

**Findings** – Worksite wellness projects initiated significant policy and environmental changes to help workers live healthier lives. The majority of workers also indicated increased physical activity and consumption of nutritious foods. Because of these positive effects, coalitions expressed a desire to continue and expand their worksite wellness projects.

**Implications** – The worksite is an effective target for initiating activities that allow people to live healthier lives. Worksite wellness projects serve as a bridge for local coalitions to have an impact in the community.

## Methods

In 2007, eleven local coalitions each received a \$4,000 grant from the DHFS through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. Each coalition worked with up to four local worksites to develop a worksite wellness program for the year. Although each coalition tailored a program to its local worksite partners, each program was developed using the Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit employing evidence-based strategies and action steps outlined in the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan and incorporated in the resource kit. Each worksite walked through the six step process outlined in the resource kit:

1. Reasons to focus on worksite wellness.
2. Developing leadership and garnering support.
3. Assessing the worksite to develop appropriate programming.
4. Policy, environmental and programming strategies for the worksite.
5. Making decisions and developing an action plan.
6. Evaluating the success of the program.



**Grant Requirements:** Each of the coalitions had the following grant requirements:

- Projects were required to use the toolkit.
- Sites did a full pre and post assessment of wellness components at each worksite.
- An emphasis was placed on implementing policy and environmental changes.
- Wellness programming should also be included.
- Sites should evaluate both process and outcome objectives.
- Sites had the option to participate in bi-monthly technical assistance calls with NPA staff and other projects for advice and peer learning opportunities.
- All sites completed a mid-year report and a final report at the end of the grant period.

“It is an excellent model for sharing resources and working together.”  
Healthy Hearts Project of Oconto County

## Results

**Partners:** The 11 grantees partnered with a diverse set of 17 worksite partners that included:

- County Government
- City Government
- Manufacturing
- Nursing Home
- Head Start
- Hospital/healthcare clinic
- Schools/Technical College/University



“A great partnership was formed between members of our coalition and a local company. They agreed to share ideas with other businesses who were looking to move ahead with wellness promotion.” (Walker Forge worksite, courtesy of Waupaca Co. NuAct Coalition.

**General Findings:**

- The total number of employees at all worksites = 5,300, of which, over 2700 participated.
- The total number of policy changes made in all sites was 45.
- The total number of environmental changes made in all sites was 50.
- There were 38 program activities or campaigns.
- Two-thirds of the coalitions found the toolkit to be very useful or extremely useful

**Policy Changes:** Changes varied by worksite, but all sites reported some of the policies listed below.

- Healthy food at meetings
- Healthy lifestyle cash or gift incentives

- Vending contracts
- Breastfeeding
- Health insurance discounts
- Health Risk Appraisals (HRAs)
- Global worksite wellness policy
- Flex scheduling for PA or breastfeeding
- Health Club discounts
- Time and space for breaks and lunch
- Set nutrition guidelines for cafeteria, vending

**Environmental Changes:** Environmental changes also varied, but all sites had at least some of the following changes.

- Point of decision signs to promote healthy choices
- Made water easily available
- Created local Walking routes/maps
- Provided bike racks
- Access to fitness facility/equipment
- Access to a shower facility
- Modified vending foods/beverage choices
- Used competitive pricing of healthy foods
- Labeled healthier foods
- Provided a Community Supported Agriculture drop off site or on-site gardening
- Provided nutrition education
- Provided a breastfeeding room
- Provided a refrigerator

**Programming:** All sites had some traditional wellness programming as part of their plan. Activities included:

- Programs open to family members
- Fitness assessments
- Recreation leagues
- Employee activity clubs
- On-site fitness opportunities
- Challenges/Events
- Long term physical activity campaigns
- Healthy food taste testing opportunities
- Weight management programs

**Evaluation:** The biggest drawback to seeing significant change was the very short duration of the project. Coalitions had less than nine months to assess worksites and implement change. Despite the time limitations there were a number of positive outcome measures that reflected the variety of changes made in many of the worksites.

Five of the worksites completed health risk appraisals of their employees. Individual health issues were identified and follow-up measures taken to address medical problems. Physical activity levels were measured at several sites. The number of individuals that were more active at the various sites ranged from 11% to 60%. One site reported that by the end of the grant period 100% of their employees were active for at least 30 minutes most days of the week. Nutrition numbers showed similar results with fruit and vegetable consumption increases ranging from 7% to 65%. Weight loss was also noted at several sites, with reports such as a third of participants had lost weight and one individual reporting a 31% decrease in body fat.

“34% of participants have lost weight.”  
Healthiest Manitowoc County 2010

All 11 coalitions planned to continue worksite wellness outreach activities after the grant ended. Five of those planned to expand efforts to other worksites. Seven of 11 groups identified that they would very likely attend additional training on worksite wellness if it were made available.

## Conclusions

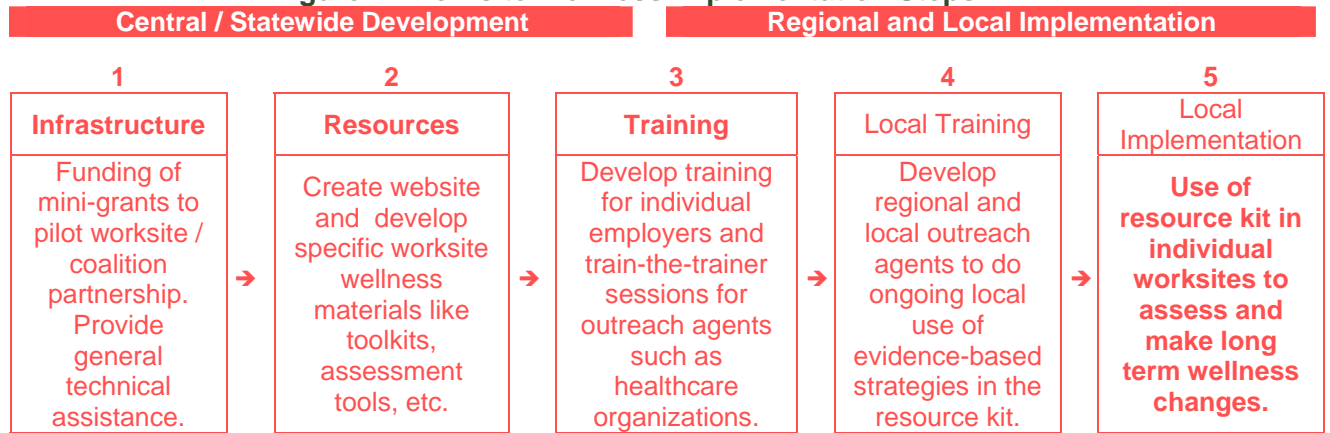
Worksites were very successful in creating policy and environmental changes that made the work environment more conducive to physical activity and good nutrition. Coupled with good program activities, most sites showed measurable positive results. Coalitions documented increases in physical activity and healthy food intake. Such changes initiated at the worksite may be the first steps to a healthier lifestyle as workers begin to practice exercise and healthy eating at home as well.

The results of these pilot worksite wellness projects indicate that worksites are effective targets for initiating healthy lifestyle changes. Worksites provide a unique opportunity to initiate healthy lifestyle changes at the community level through the coalition-worksite partnership model. Future steps should include involvement of other outreach agents such as healthcare organizations, health insurers, local health departments, YMCAs and other providers of preventive health strategies.

## Implications

The early focus of the worksite wellness plan was to develop an infrastructure to support statewide and local efforts (see figure 1). Most of the necessary infrastructure pieces such as development of a central web site, development of key resource materials and trainings, and identification of evidence-based strategies are now in place. Steps to implement the strategies at the state, regional and local levels will be a major focus in the upcoming years of the plan. The ability to identify, recruit and facilitate local individuals, groups and resources to implement what is now known will be the biggest challenge for the upcoming years.

**Figure 1- Worksite Wellness Implementation Steps**



The Nutrition and Physical Activity Program role in future worksite wellness initiatives will be to broaden the number and type of outreach agents and educators who are already providing some preventive or wellness services to worksites. The next logical step is to provide train-the-trainer opportunities for these targeted groups that can use the evidence-based strategies in the resource kit to bring about meaningful outcomes. By developing a larger number of trained people as local outreach resources, the reach of the useful tools in the resource kit will increase markedly.

A second role will be to seek funding or assist others to seek funding to provide seed money to local coalitions and worksites as an incentive to develop wellness programs. This type of incentive will also increase the reach and impact of this intervention.

### Acknowledgement of Participating Coalitions:

- Altoona on the Go
- Brown Co. Healthy Weight Coalition for Youth Coalition
- Green Lake Area Health and Wellness Coalition
- Healthiest Manitowoc County 2010
- Healthy Hearts Project of Oconto County
- Merrill Area Healthy Lifestyle Network
- Polk Co Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition
- Rock County Healthy Living Coalition
- U W– River Falls Health and Wellness Coalition
- Waukesha Wellness Advocates
- Waupaca County NuAct Coalition



“Our group has taken on the concept of wellness and ran with it. We now have healthier options for snacks available in 18 departments, we have a newsletter that reaches everyone, we have a web site in development, we sponsor fun wellness events, and we have developed an on site work out room.”  
(Photo Courtesy of Team Rock County)