

2018 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS || MENDOCINO COUNTY WORKING ON WELLNESS

OVERVIEW: The County of Mendocino implemented an innovative wellness program designed to decrease county medical claims cost by engaging employees in healthy behaviors through incentive rewards.

CHALLENGE: In an effort to curtail increasing medical claims costs, the Employee Wellness program (Mendocino County Working on Wellness, or MCWOW) under the County of Mendocino Human Resources Department decided to take an aggressive approach to engage employees in the adoption of healthier lifestyle habits through a wellness incentive program tied to health plan premium reductions.

SOLUTION: The MCWOW program offers a comprehensive, participation-based wellness program to employees (and their dependents over age 18) covered on the County Health Plan. MCWOW provides a host of activities and services to covered members to help them develop healthier habits and work-life balance, so that they in turn can serve their customers more efficiently. The program offers negotiated fitness center discounts, monthly health education or stress management classes through a partnership with the Employee Assistance Program and local hospitals, a health & wellness lending library, telephonic health coaching/free smoking cessation assistance through a contracted wellness vendor, and county-wide health challenges. On the journey to creating a true culture of health, the MCWOW program realized that for members to identify the importance of participating in the above services, and thus start on a pathway to better health, they needed to know their current health status. MCWOW recognized that in order to impact County health plan costs, eligible members needed to participate in health screenings, and to that end, they also needed some additional motivation to participate. Supported by the Board of Supervisors and Chief Executive Officer, the County offered an Incentive Program which provided a \$500 health premium reduction to all employees who participated in the Incentive Program. The communication campaign message was simple and began with all employee emails, home mailings, posters and website notifications

(www.mendocinocounty.org/hr/mcwow). During the qualification period of January 1st – November 1st, employees have 3 requirements they must meet to pre-qualify for the incentive. The requirements included 1) completing a Biometric Health Screening and 2) a Health Risk Assessment, along with 3) earning 100 health & wellness points through a variety of options. The points can be earned through participation in various county-wide challenges, onsite classes, online webinars, health coaching and fitness activities. Program participants have a designated website portal which allows them to view their incentive progress online through the course of the program. The \$500 incentive reward is provided beginning January the subsequent year and is pro-rated across 26 pay periods. By using a multitude of interventions, the goal of the Incentive Program is to increase engagement, create a culture of health and in doing so, control rising County costs.

BUDGET: The Employee Wellness Program is financed through the County's self-funded health plan along with anticipated claims savings of participants in the wellness program. The budget for the Wellness Program was \$297,978 which included the cost for the Wellness Program Coordinator, administrative costs incurred by the Wellness Vendor (telephonic health coaching, health screenings, promotional material, customized personal wellness portal including incentive tracking capabilities, and online courses, along with miscellaneous office supplies).

¹ Biometric Health Screenings provide the opportunity for participants to learn more about their health risks through various biometric measures including: Body Mass Index, Blood Pressure and Blood Cholesterol Levels (HDL, LDL, Triglycerides, Glucose).

² Personal Health Risk Assessments are questionnaires that gauge one's personal health risks through a series of lifestyle related questions.

RESULTS: Over the course of 14 different onsite health screenings facilitated by MCWOW and the local lab, 706 individuals (72.4%) participated in the incentive program. According to a recent study, when participation rates are at 50% or more, wellness programs discover 79% more employees at high risk for health conditions than would be discovered at 30% participation. The number of risks per participant increases with the participation rate, indicating that individuals with multiple health risks are also more likely to participate when more of their peers are also participating. Data obtained from the Health Screenings and completed Health Risk Assessments have in addition, served as an important tool giving MCWOW invaluable direction concerning high risk areas of program participants as well as their readiness to change. MCWOW learned for example, that much like the rest of the nation, obesity was an increasing risk factor. The Health Screenings prevented dangerous medical issues from occurring in at least 2 individuals who were directed to seek immediate medical attention. A total of 837 County employees (85.8%) participated in at least one component of the MCWOW program during the 2017 calendar year. With increased participation resulting from a forward thinking Incentive Program, MCWOW was able to identify areas of high risk, and create a culture of health in the County workplace through engagement resulting in decreased county costs. The Health plan has remained steady and employees have not seen a rate increase in the last 3 years. The County of Mendocino's Health Plan Consultant identified that the stability of the health plan rates is directly attributed to the actively increasing participation levels of the Wellness program. This level of engagement and excitement for healthy change has never been accomplished before and MCWOW anticipates continued and increasing success as each new incentive program year begins.

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