

Leadership Maine

Phi Class

Team Project

Workplace Wellness Programs – reducing the rates of overweight and obesity in Maine

The health and wellness of our population is a critical factor in making Maine a great place to live and to thrive economically. For Measures of Growth in Focus 2013, the Maine Economic Growth Council (MEGC) has selected the percent of overweight and obese adults as an indicator of wellness and prevention. Data from 2012 show that 64.2% of Maine adults are overweight or obese, just over the national rate. MEGC has set a benchmark that the percent of overweight and obese adults in Maine will decrease to 50% by 2015.

The Yellow Team of the Phi Class of Leadership Maine was charged with carrying out a project to positively affect the rate of obesity in Maine. As a group we found a common attraction to this topic because almost all of us have struggled with overweight/obesity issues as individuals or in our families. This should not be surprising given that almost 2/3 of Mainers are overweight or obese; this is an issue that affects Maine citizens and families at a very personal level.

Overweight and obesity rates are also an economic issue for Maine and a barrier to economic growth and vitality. Measures for Growth sites the relationship of overweight and obesity rates to productivity, costs of doing business, costs of health care, on-the-job injuries and illnesses, health insurance coverage, poverty and food insecurity.

The Yellow Team initiated our work with a review and sharing of literature. In our early discussions we selected two aspects of the issue to consider addressing: childhood overweight and obesity and workplace wellness programs. Children are the adults of Maine's futures and also are a direct link to adult health behavior –parents can easily get engaged in issues affecting their children's wellbeing and may be motivated to change their own eating and exercise habits in the interest of family health. Workplace wellness programs are a lever for impacting most adults where they spend a great deal of time and energy, and employers have a significant stake in the issue because of links to productivity and costs as noted above.

Team members met with Dr. Tory Rogers founder of Let's Go (www.letsgo.org), a national movement based in Maine, to address childhood health and wellness. After preliminary contacts and discussions with programs focused on children and those focusing on workplace wellness programs, we decided to devote our work to the workplace wellness arena and to work with Healthy Maine Works (HMW), a program of the Maine Centers for Disease Control.

HMW has a website with tools for employers to use in developing and maintaining wellness programs for employees and dependents. The website was seen to be underperforming in terms of adoption of the program, and HMW had received feedback that the site was not easy to navigate or user friendly. HMW was already working to redo the website. They needed a boost in awareness to drive users to the

new website and more information about what employers would find useful. Working with HMW we found two tangible ways to move their efforts forward. First, with the generous contribution of resources of WCSH, we were able to produce a public service announcement (PSA) that will draw attention to the site to increase traffic. The PSA is designed to be aired when the new website is ready to go live. Second, we conducted an employer survey about wellness programs and the HMW program. The survey was distributed through Leadership Maine Alumni. An outstanding response of 250 Maine employers provided a wealth of information for HMW.

Products of our team's work include the PSA, the survey questionnaire, and the responses to the questionnaire. With the permission of WCSH and HMW, those products are made available to document our work and as a foundation for future work in this area.

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