

Leading Toward Health

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE WELLNESS AT
DISABILITY PROVIDER ORGANIZATIONS



Ohio Disability and Health Program
May 2019

Benefits of Implementing Workplace Wellness

Workplace wellness programs are defined as a group of coordinated actions or set of health promotion and protection strategies, including programs, policies, benefits, and environmental supports, that are designed to encourage the health and safety of employees (CDC, 2015). These programs are frequently offered by employers as a way to decrease health care costs, employee absenteeism, and disability claims by helping employees engage in healthy behaviors. Studies on the cost benefit of workplace wellness programs have reported an average of \$5.93 to \$1 savings to cost ratio. (ITA Group, 2017) Human resource-related benefits of workplace wellness programs have been referred to as Value on Investment (VOI), and include metrics such as employee health risks, job satisfaction, productivity, and job turnover rate.

Making the Case for Wellness at Disability Provider Agencies

Among workers in the direct support industry, direct support professionals who care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the highest turnover rate. Staff turnover at disability provider agencies can be disruptive to managers, staff, and most importantly, service recipients. In addition to improved health outcomes, the potential VOI benefits of workplace wellness programs are particularly important for direct support professionals, who often experience job-related stress, insufficient wages, and feelings of being undervalued. (Ejaz, Bukach, Dawson, Gitter, & Judge, 2015) Work-related stress can be detrimental to not only the mental and physical health of the worker, but also decrease the quality of care they are able to provide. Perceived support from organizational leadership has been shown to decrease work-related stress and job turnover in staff who provide full time care to adults with disabilities. (Gray-Stanley et al., 2010)

Disability provider organization leadership (key members of senior management and operating officers) influence organizational culture in many ways and can provide support to employees through a commitment to their well-being. By creating policies that allow space for health promotion in daily schedules, leadership can motivate employees to participate in learning more about their own health and adopting new healthy habits. Wellness activities in the workplace may serve as a source of social connection for both staff and service recipients, supporting both initial interest and continued participation in the program. Leadership can increase opportunities for these positive social interactions at work sites through wellness, incrementally improving both organizational morale and VOI metrics (employee health risks, job satisfaction, productivity, and job turnover).

Why ‘Inclusive Wellness’?

Wellness is not only the state of being in good health but also the process of actively making choices to increase health status. Evidence has shown that adults with disabilities and their caregivers often experience similar health disparities due to lack of preventative health care, increased rates of chronic conditions, and higher likelihood of engaging in unhealthy lifestyle behaviors such as smoking or inadequate physical activity. Promoting wellness at your organization can be inclusive of both target

groups and be effective in helping people change unhealthy behaviors by making better choices. Wellness initiatives are considered inclusive when people at all mobility and health literacy levels can participate fully.

Organizations can reference the [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#) to ensure that health programs and messaging can be understood by all.

Areas of Focus for Disability Provider Organizations

The recommendations in this guide focus on dimensions of wellness that can be addressed through low cost, incremental changes, both in groups or individually. Promoting health in these areas can help staff make changes that reduce risk of chronic disease and work-related stress that can lead to job turnover.

Physical Activity

Supporting physical activity in the workplace can assist staff in meeting federally recommended guidelines of 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Wellness programs should include group activities for social engagement and motivation for increasing physical activity, but also supports for those who prefer individual practice. Some examples of programs to increase physical activity include:

- Walking programs, Zumba/dance classes, Move Your Way, Go4Life

Nutrition

Nutrition education programs and tools can help staff make gradual changes to diet that are beneficial to overall health and disease prevention. This could mean discovering new healthy foods and preparation methods, nutritious alternatives to favorite foods, or portion control methods. When possible, provide ways for participants to engage fully in hands-on activities and taste testing in addition to class discussions. Some examples of educational programs and tools to assist with making healthy food choices include:

- MyPlate, Fruits & Veggies- More Matters, Traffic Light Diet, Cooking Matters

Stress Management

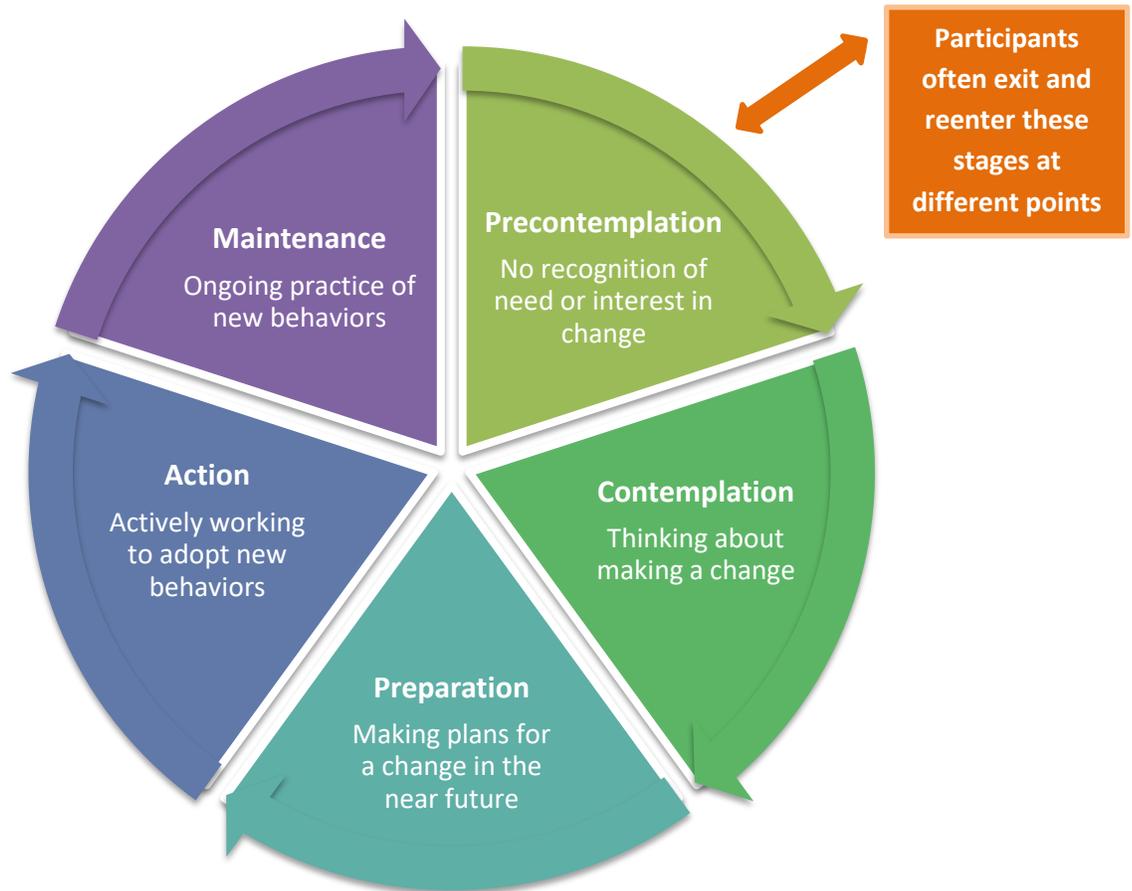
Educating staff about stress management techniques will help equip them with tools to manage difficult situations in the moment. Reducing the severity of the stress responses at times when they occur may decrease risk of chronic stress and associated mental and physical health problems. Classes and other educational events can be helpful for practicing techniques to be used when applicable. Some examples of evidence-based stress management techniques include:

- Positive psychology interventions (Gratitude, forgiveness, savoring, flow, etc.), Progressive relaxation techniques (Progressive muscle relaxation), Mindfulness meditation (Body scan, components from Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction)

Helping People Make Positive Changes

Making lifestyle changes is a process and often involves replacing a negative health behavior with a positive one. Six individual stages have been identified to describe how people generally adopt change, as shown in the diagram below. Oftentimes, social support provided by coworkers and peers increases the likelihood of change at any stage. Using multiple modes of communication, as suggested in this guide, can help reach people with different learning styles and levels of experience. It is important to keep in mind that promoting a culture of health at your organization through a diverse range of actions can reach even non-participants and move them towards the next step in making a positive change.

Stages of Change Model



Health promotion initiatives should always be open to the needs and preferences of the participants. Leadership should engage with staff to gain input on how to implement this program at their site in order to gain buy-in and show lasting impact on health and organizational outcomes. This guide is designed to provide low-cost, modifiable strategies for organizational leadership to plan wellness activities at their company with consideration of cost, transportation, and other barriers that disability provider agencies may commonly encounter when trying to implement health policies and programs.

How this guide is structured

This program is broken into the following strategic action domains of organizational culture. Implementing program elements within all three domains will allow you to approach wellness holistically and create multi-directional, lasting change.

ACTION DOMAINS

1. Organizational Support	2. Programs and Activities	3. Environmental Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated Staff• Wellness policies• Communications• Health-related goals• Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classes• Events• Challenges• Health-related community sites• System for tracking engagement and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical activity promotion• Access to healthy food and drinks at all facilities• Stress reduction spaces• Health messaging

Within each action domain you will make a commitment to the level of implementation that best fits your organization. Choice of program level will depend on the amount of resources available and structure of the organization. Implementation levels include a list of ways to strategically address physical, emotional, and occupational dimensions of wellness through **Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Stress Management** education and practice.

Enhanced

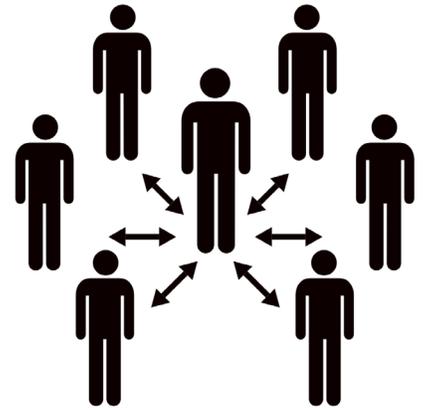
This level of program implementation will show the most impact on outcomes related to organizational culture and health. The organization will need to provide the resources necessary to support these activities, which could include staff time, participation incentives, and/or equipment.

Core

This level of program implementation will show smaller impact on outcomes related to organizational culture and health. Resources necessary to implement this level are lower than **Enhanced**, but will need to include staff time and incentives.

1. Organizational Support

The support of Leadership (senior management and operating officers) is essential in gaining acceptance from staff who may see wellness endeavors as outside of accepted job parameters or rights as an employee. Leadership can create interest in wellness and the development of the related skills and knowledge that lead to lifestyle changes for people at their organization. Organizational support strategies should use inclusive language and address individuals across diverse program areas of the organization. Wellness communications need to help staff build a basic knowledge base on the importance of adopting healthy behaviors. These communications can also inform potential participants of who the internal wellness champions at their organization are and how they can be contacted by participants.



ENHANCED

Dedicated Staff

- Members of Leadership and staff form a Wellness Committee. This committee meets on a quarterly basis to discuss health programming and planning.
- Designate staff person as Wellness Champion, a liaison between employees and Committee.

Wellness Policies

- Wellness Committee develops and implements policy that promotes employee access to participation in wellness program activities at work.
- Health and wellness is included in organization Vision and Mission statements.

Communications

- The Wellness Committee plans scheduled health-related communications to staff and individuals, including face-to face meetings, email announcements, social media, and regularly posted health messaging and production of handouts.
- Leadership attends group health challenge kick off meetings and communicates regularly with staff and individuals about group progress.

Health-related goals

- Options for health and wellness metrics are included in job descriptions and person-centered performance goals.

Funding

- Leadership provides yearly budget for wellness participation incentives for 2 events, class sessions or challenges yearly.
- Organization provides necessary operating costs for programs and activities.
- Leadership leverages employee health plan resources to offer employees wellness incentives.

Organizational Support



CORE

Dedicated Staff

- Members of Leadership and staff form a Wellness Committee. This committee meets on a quarterly basis to discuss health programming and planning.

Wellness Policies

- Wellness Committee develops and implements policy that promotes employee participation in wellness program activities at work.

Communications

- The Wellness Committee plans scheduled health-related communications to staff and individuals, including face-to face meetings, email announcements, social media, and regularly posted health messaging and production of handouts.
- Leadership attends group health challenge kick off meetings and communicates regularly with staff and individuals about group progress.

Health-related goals

- Options for health and wellness metrics are included in person-centered performance goals.

Funding

- Leadership provides yearly budget for wellness participation incentives for 1 event, class session, or challenge yearly.
- Leadership leverages employee health plan resources to offer employees wellness incentives.

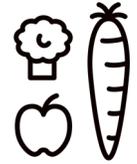


Ideas

- Get involved! Participation by Leadership in wellness activities helps increase staff involvement and provides social support.
- Survey employees yearly to find out their areas of interest and what goals they have for themselves related to health and wellness.
- Use staff meetings as a time to integrate wellness ideas.
Examples: Start with guided breathing or chair yoga stretches, pass out healthy snacks, ask people to offer ideas for upcoming programs, make fruit infused water available.
- Offer staff the opportunity to share wellness goals in meetings with peers or service recipients.
- Incentives that are offered to people who choose to participate should be health-related.
Examples: Water bottles, energy bars, fitness trackers, points toward an extra paid day off.
- Speak to your health benefits representative about what they can offer your enrollees. Onsite health screenings, incentive programs, and tracking systems may be available at no or low cost.

2. Programs and Activities

Providing wellness programs and activities at your organization shows a commitment to staff well-being and can help increase not only social engagement between peers, but also a feeling of connectedness to the organization. Staff may have little time outside of work to meet recommended amounts of physical activity or dietary nutrition requirements and these programs can assist with meeting goals. If service delivery takes place at multiple locations with varying intensity of support, consider these factors when planning and offer ways for off-site employees to connect. Organizational staff often come from diverse backgrounds and all planned programs and activities should be inclusive to a range of knowledge and abilities. Universally designed wellness activities create places for everyone to participate together and encourage each other to sustain healthy behaviors.



ENHANCED

Classes

- Classes are scheduled 3 times per week, providing evidence-based education and/or practice in the areas of physical activity, nutrition, or stress management. Classes should be split into quarterly sessions in order to refocus content and increase new enrollment. Depending on organizational capacity, classes may use in-person or virtual instruction, but must be facilitated by a designated staff member. Incentives may be offered for participation.

Events

- Two health-related events are sponsored and planned by the organization. Events may be designed for a large group, such as a health fair or field day, or be focused on a smaller group with targeted interests, such as a healthy cooking class or guest speaker. Incentives may be offered for participation.

Challenges

- At least 2 group health challenges are planned yearly for the organization where each participant sets a personal health goal that contributes to a predefined group goal within a specified time frame. Health challenges should be designed around the interests of participants to increase healthy behaviors (e.g. number of steps/distance rolled, water consumption, vegetable servings, time spent in meditation, etc.) Incentives may be offered for participation.

Health-related community sites

- Staff options for 10 community sites that relate to a health objective are determined by the Wellness Committee and distributed to staff. These sites may present recreational, educational, or volunteer/employment opportunities in the community.

System for tracking engagement and outcomes

- System for staff to measure progress toward an individual or group health goal is provided. This tracking system should use levels of measurement and technology that are appropriate for staff at the organization and assist in tracking for participation incentives.



CORE

Classes

- One class is scheduled per week, providing evidence-based education and/or practice in the areas of physical activity, nutrition, or stress management. Classes should be split into quarterly sessions in order to refocus content and increase new enrollment. Depending on organizational capacity, classes may use in-person or virtual instruction, but must be facilitated by a designated staff member. Incentives may be offered for participation.

Events

- One health-related event is sponsored and planned by the organization. Event should focus on reaching the largest number of people possible, such as a health fair or field day. Incentives may be offered for participation.

Challenges

- At least 1 group health challenge is planned yearly for the organization where each participant sets a personal health goal that contributes to a predefined group goal within a specified time frame. The health challenge should be designed around the interests of participants to increase healthy behaviors (e.g. number of steps/distance rolled, water consumption, vegetable servings, time spent in meditation, etc.) Incentives may be offered for participation.

Health-related community sites

- Staff options for 10 community sites that relate to a health objective are determined by the Wellness Committee and distributed to staff. These sites may present recreational, educational, or volunteer/employment opportunities in the community.

System for tracking engagement and outcomes

- System for staff to measure progress toward an individual or group health goal is provided. This tracking system should use levels of measurement and technology that are appropriate for staff at the organization and assist in tracking for participation incentives.



Ideas

- Find programs and activities that are designed to meet the needs of people within a diverse range of literacy level and function, so all will be able to fully participate without adaptation. Examples: HealthMatters, Healthy Lifestyles, Cooking Matters, mindfulness techniques, etc.
- Allow staff and service recipients to facilitate classes and create new health resources. Provide training and other resources to key staff to implement programs that hold personal interest.
- Think of ways to include wellness in favorite activities or use creative ways to gather interest. Examples: Using sports teams, exciting locales, or favorite fictional characters as themes for challenges. Finding ways to add small amounts of movement to existing leisure activities.

3. Environmental Support

Workplace culture and the work site can be highly influential in what choices staff make while working. Making changes to the work environment can help people more easily make healthy choices. This may mean that the organization makes adjustments to existing systems to include healthier alternatives in food options or that health education is posted at targeted locations throughout a facility. These actions may help those in the early stages of behavior change move toward action or serve as motivation to those working on maintenance.



ENHANCED

Physical activity promotion

- Exercise routes in and around facilities are available to staff and service recipients. Where possible, external signage to guide walkers/rollers on outside routes is installed.
- Spaces designated for physical activity are available for classes and recreational use. The organization may provide fitness tools or lightweight equipment for use in this space.
- Access to technology is provided at worksites to assist participants in using health related apps, videos, and other online resources.

Access to healthy food and drinks at all facilities

- Vending machines stock lower calorie, less processed (low fat, low sugar) snack foods and beverages.
- Water dispensers and fountains are clearly labeled. Cups or bottles are accessible nearby.
- Meal plans use lower calorie, nutrient-dense ingredient options in addition to meeting daily nutrition requirements.
- Meetings include low calorie, nutrient-dense options when providing food.

Stress reduction spaces

- Space that can function as a stress reduction space for staff and service recipients is allocated within work site(s). Each space should have options for low lighting and reduced noise. Leadership may determine policy for rules of use and acceptable behavior in this space.

Health messaging

- Point of decision prompts: Post health information near vending machines, kitchens, stairs, smoking areas and other places where people are making choices relating to healthy or unhealthy behaviors. Postings should focus on presenting health information that is simple and relevant to the immediate surroundings of the reader.
- Health bulletin board is posted in an open area for communication purposes. Wellness program announcements, notifications, sign-up and reminders are posted.



Environmental Supports

CORE

Physical activity promotion

- Exercise routes in and around facilities are available to staff and service recipients. Where possible, external signage to guide walkers/rollers on outside routes is installed.
- Spaces designated for physical activity are available for classes and recreational use. The organization may provide fitness tools or lightweight equipment for use in this space.

Access to healthy food and drinks at all facilities

- Vending machines stock lower calorie, less processed (low fat, low sugar) snack foods and beverages.
- Water dispensers and fountains are clearly labeled. Cups or bottles are accessible nearby.
- Meal plans use lower calorie, nutrient-dense ingredient options in addition to meeting daily nutrition requirements.
- Meetings include low calorie, nutrient-dense options when providing food.

Stress reduction spaces

- Guidance is distributed by organization to staff for best ways to find quiet space at work site(s).

Health messaging

- Point of decision prompts: Post health information near vending machines, kitchens, stairs, smoking areas and other places where people are making choices relating to healthy or unhealthy behaviors. Postings should focus on presenting health information that is simple and relevant to the immediate surroundings of the reader.



Ideas

- Utilize existing online resources for health messaging. Governmental public health and other federal agencies often have free printable signs that use plain language and eye-catching graphics.
Examples: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP)
- Include key staff in regular conversations about what types of environmental support they find most useful. Responding to this feedback will help provide staff with ownership of the changes that are important to them.
- Create opportunities to discuss environmental supports in meetings and announce new changes.

Visit the Leading Toward Health webpage for more information about programs mentioned in this guide and additional resources for getting started with your inclusive wellness program: <http://go.osu.edu/LTHwellness>

Ethical Guidelines:

To avoid potential areas of discrimination, wellness programming should not provide basis for employment bonuses or additional compensation for participation or the attainment of certain health standards.

An employer cannot penalize an employee for not participating.

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Wellness at Work. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/features/workingwellness/index.html>

ITA Group. (2017). Workplace Wellness Program Statistics You Need to Know. Retrieved from: <https://www.itagroup.com/insights/workplace-wellness-programs>

Ejaz, F. K., Bukach, A. M., Dawson, N., Gitter, R., & Judge, K. S. (2015). Examining Direct Service Worker Turnover in Three Long-Term Care Industries in Ohio. *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 27(2), 139–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2014.987034>

Gray-Stanley, J. A., Muramatsu, N., Heller, T., Hughes, S., Johnson, T. P., & Ramirez-Valles, J. (2010). Work stress and depression among direct support professionals: The role of work support and locus of control. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research : JIDR*, 54(8), 749–761. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2010.01303.x>



This guide is a product of the **Ohio Disability and Health Program (ODHP)**, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to improve the health and well-being of people with disabilities. This document is supported by the CDC Cooperative Agreement Number 5U59DD000931-02. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.

