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Workplace Physical Activity Policies in West Virginia

Section I: Introduction

As part of its Statement of Work the West Virginia Physical Activity Network (WVPAN) was asked to compile a list of physical activity policies to share with the Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease. In the course of researching this topic it became apparent that most organizations in West Virginia do not have formal workplace policies. Workplaces may have wellness programs, and some have committed to including physical activity as part of their workplace culture, but research and conversations did not reveal formal policies included in employee handbooks or company policies on physical activity similar to other policies on employee behavior (i.e., dress code, workday arrival and departure times, break times, expected conduct, etc.).

Section II contains general information about chronic disease conditions and promoting health and wellbeing in the workplace. The Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease is already aware of this information, but WVPAN provided this summary as a resource to use for approaching employers about implementing some type of workplace physical activity program.

In the absence of finding formal physical activity policies, WVPAN has gathered some information on workplace wellness programs, benefits, and other areas relating to physical activity in Section III. This information is intended as a starting point on the topic of workplace wellness and is by no means comprehensive. It is provided for workplaces that may be considering implementing some type of wellness program, or are committed to changing their organization's culture, and are searching for a place to start and ideas to replicate.

Section IV contains examples of policies that can be easily copied by workplaces looking to include a formal, written physical activity policy in their employee handbooks. Only one of these "copy and paste" examples is from West Virginia, but the others can easily be adopted by any organization and edited to fit their workplace.

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Section II: Workplace Wellness – Why Do We Care?

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes have a huge impact on West Virginia. These diseases account for a large number of preventable deaths,^{1,2} and have a staggering financial impact on the state. In 2003, for example, the cost of treating chronic conditions in West Virginia was \$2.3 billion.³

Chronic diseases are a problem nationwide, and there is growing national concern with preventing chronic diseases and focusing on wellness and prevention. First Lady Michelle Obama started a national campaign called Let's Move!⁴ to target childhood obesity, and the Surgeon General released a 2015 call to action to promote walking and the creation of more walkable communities, recognizing increased physical activity as a public health issue as important as preventing skin cancer, supporting breastfeeding, and smoking cessation.⁵

One major driver in the focus on chronic disease prevention and wellness is economic. Simply put, healthy people cost less to employ and are more productive.^{6,7,8} Thus, employers are becoming increasingly interested in promoting health in their workforces, through both formal workplace programs and organizational cultural change.

Workplace wellness programs are health promotion activities or organization-wide policies designed to support healthy behaviors and improve health outcomes while at work.⁹ In West Virginia, the Wellness Council of West Virginia (WCWV) has a mission of “Assisting West Virginians with healthier lifestyles through workplace initiatives”. WVPAN contacted WCWV for information about award-winning wellness programs in the state, but was recommended to contact each organization individually for more detailed information about physical activity specifically.

As the positioned leader in the area of workplace wellness, WVPAN recommends the Division of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease work closely with WCWV to identify and promote best practices from WV workplaces (if this is not already ongoing). WCWV holds a yearly conference focused on workplace wellness, and recognizes top workplace wellness programs with awards. These award submittals would provide information and ideas for other workplaces in the state.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. West Virginia: Burden of Chronic Diseases. 2008. http://198.246.124.29/chronicdisease/states/pdf/west_virginia.pdf

² Birgit A. Shanholtzer, MA. The burden of cardiovascular disease in West Virginia. 2011. http://www.wvdhhr.org/bph/hsc/pubs/other/burdenofcvd2010/cvh_burden_2010.pdf

³ From: DeVol, Ross, and Armen Bedroussian, An Unhealthy America: The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease, Milken Institute, October 2007. http://www.chronicdiseaseimpact.org/state_sheet/WV.pdf

⁴ <http://www.letsmove.gov/>

⁵ <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/walking-and-walkable-communities/>

⁶ Partnership for Prevention. Worksite health facts. <https://www.prevent.org/Topics.aspx?ealD=2&topicID=16>

⁷ Chatterjee A, Kubendran S, King J, DeVol R. Checkup time: Chronic disease and wellness in America, Measuring the economic burden in a changing nation. 2014. <http://assets1c.milkeninstitute.org/assets/Publication/ResearchReport/PDF/Checkup-Time-Chronic-Disease-and-Wellness-in-America.pdf>

⁸ Trust for America's Health and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The healthcare costs of obesity. <http://stateofobesity.org/healthcare-costs-obesity/>

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Wellness at work. <http://www.cdc.gov/features/workingwellness/>

Section III: Ideas and Examples From West Virginia Workplaces

The following is a collection of ideas and examples for organizations interested in promoting physical activity in their workplace. Although these are not necessarily formal policies, they provide a place to start for employers who are interested in improving employee health. Links to the organizations listed here as examples can be found in Section IIIA.

An excellent resource for small to medium-size organizations interested in workplace wellness can be found here: http://www.prevent.org/data/files/initiatives/lbe_smse_2011_final.pdf

Link health screenings, physical activity and health insurance benefits or premiums.

Davis & Elkins College's wellness program uses this strategy:

"Employees can choose to participate in the D&E Wellness screening and receive a \$10 discount per month on family coverage if both the employee and their spouse are screened. Single employees receive a \$5 discount on their premium per month. The additional full wellness discount is provided if employees participate in qualified wellness activities for only 1 hour per week."

Provide on-site fitness equipment and/or active areas.

Davis & Elkins College offers access to its indoor walking track, fitness center and pool for employees. Employees must sign in on a Wellness Program roster to receive credit toward their insurance premium discount.

WVU Wellness provides a 24-hour facility that employees can access at any time after they have signed up for the program and received an orientation.

Allow employees to track walking or other physical activity through apps such as MapMyRun, MyFitnessPal, and the "health" app on their phone's OS; or through devices such as a FitBit. Count this activity toward earning some type of benefit or perk.

Davis & Elkins Employee Wellness program allows employees to submit information from apps toward earning their insurance premium discount.

The Mingo County Diabetes Coalition tracks non-walking physical activity (playing sports, swimming, cycling, etc.) to earn Wellness Points during its Healthy Feud Physical Activity Challenge. Participants can redeem these points for prizes.

Provide free or discounted exercise classes for employees.

WVU Wellness provides exercise classes for employees ranging from Zumba to boot camp to yoga. Cost for employees is \$3 per semester, plus a certain number of "wellness points".

Develop a policy related to physical activity sessions during the workday, such as adding 15 minutes to lunch breaks.

Citizens Bank of West Virginia, headquartered in Elkins, allows employees to extend their break by 30 minutes, provided they spend that time walking. The company provides employees with tee shirts and asks that employees wear them while they walk.

Encourage short physical activity sessions (e.g., walking, stretching) during all breaks periods and/or during shift changes.

Try This West Virginia and the Healthy Kids and Families Coalition both build physical activity breaks into their meetings and conferences. These organizations will schedule physical activity breaks into the agenda so everyone knows to expect them.

Promote individual and/or team pedometer challenges with incentives.

The Mingo County Diabetes Coalition hosts large physical activity challenges using the Walk 100 Miles in 100 Days format. In addition to Coalition members participating, this is open to anyone who wishes to join. Participants can receive tee shirts and other prizes.

Counties are invited to join in WVU Extension's Summer Steps challenge. This mileage tracking program also counts other forms of physical activity as "miles". The winning county receives a Live Well West Virginia Community sign and a free walkability study.

Negotiate employee discounts or subsidize employee memberships at local fitness facilities/YMCAs, and count participation in classes at these places towards employee wellness program perks.

Citizens Bank of West Virginia provides a membership to the local YMCA for all full-time employees.

Davis & Elkins Wellness Program allows employees to earn credit toward a discount insurance premium for attending classes at the local YMCA, provided they sign in to the class.

Place point-of-decision prompts (e.g., signage near stairs, map walking routes) to promote the benefits of physical activity.

The 'Take The Stairs Kanawha County' campaign promotes stair use with signs informing people of the benefits of taking the stairs versus the elevator (i.e., saving time, burning more calories, etc.) and encouraged Kanawha County worksites with multiple floors to join the challenge.

Make a workplace team to participate in active events such as foot or bike races.

Morgantown Running, a running specialty store, has an adult track team as well as organizes open community runs and races. Making a work racing team is common for running and cycling shops, but it doesn't have to be limited to these types of workplaces.

Create standing desks.

At WVPAN, we do this by putting empty paper boxes on top of the desk to raise a computer to an appropriate height for standing and working.

Section IIIA: List Of Organizations Mentioned In Examples

Davis & Elkins College

Elkins, WV

http://www.dewv.edu/sites/default/files/u4/employee_wellness_v1.pdf

WVU Wellness

Morgantown, WV

<http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/wellness/>

Mingo County Diabetes Coalition

Williamson, WV

<http://mingodiabetes.com/Dashboard/pages/HealthyFeud2015Welcomepacket.pdf>

Citizens Bank of West Virginia

Elkins, WV

<https://www.citizenswv.com/about-citizens/careers>

Try This West Virginia

Charleston, WV

<http://trythiswv.com/>

Healthy Kids and Families Coalition

Charleston, WV

<http://wvhealthykids.org/>

WVU Extension Service Summer Steps

Statewide

<http://fh.ext.wvu.edu/summer-steps>

Take The Stairs Kanawha County

Kanawha County, WV

<https://www.facebook.com/takethestairskanawhacounty>

Morgantown Running

Morgantown, WV

<http://morgantownrunning.com/mr-wv-flyers/>

West Virginia Physical Activity Network (WVPAN)

Fairmont, WV

<https://www.facebook.com/WVPAN>

Section IV: Policy Examples

This section contains policy language relating to physical activity in workplaces. These examples can be copied and replicated in the state.

Sample Physical Activity Policy – Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina

<http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/PhysicalActivityAndHealthyEatingPolicy/Texts/Sample%20Physical%20Activity%20Policy.pdf>

Sample Physical Activity Policy

For use within any organization seeking to increase opportunities for physical activity

Whereas: _____ (organization name) is concerned about the health of our members;

Whereas: People have become more and more interested in eating smart and moving more;

Whereas: Cancer, heart disease and stroke—the top three causes of death in <North Carolina>—are largely affected by what we eat and how physically active we are;

Whereas: Physical activity is associated with many positive health benefits and can prevent or delay the onset of many chronic diseases;

Therefore: Effective _____ (date), it is the policy of _____ (organization name) that activities and events sponsored or supported by this organization will always include opportunities for physical activity by:

- **Building physical activity breaks into meetings, conferences and events**
Such as stretch breaks, icebreakers or other activities
- **Identifying physical activity opportunities**
Such as maps with walking routes and local attractions; recreational and exercise facilities; organizing walking groups and other group activities
- **Supporting schedules to allow physical activity**
Such as encouraging flexible work schedules; longer lunch breaks to provide time for physical activity; and adding physical activity breaks to meeting agendas
- **Providing encouragement from group leadership to engage in physical activity**
Such as promoting healthy lifestyles; physical activity for employees; serving as role models for staff

Signature _____ Title _____

Organization Name _____ Date _____

Sample In-Depth Physical Activity Policy – Glasgow, Scotland

<https://www.peelregion.ca/health/workplace/employers/policies/pdfs/phys-act-sample-policy.pdf>

Policy Aim: To promote and encourage employees' regular participation in moderate physical activity.

Objectives

1. Raise awareness of health related benefits of physical activity and the health risks of physical inactivity.
2. Educate employees concerning the types and amounts of activity necessary to benefit health.

Policy Actions

The company will:

- Provide educational leaflets and resource information on health-related activity
- Provide staff seminars on the benefits of physical activity and the risks of inactivity
- Hold physical activity promotional events

Objective

3. Advertise and promote opportunities for participation in health related physical activity to all employees.

Policy Actions

The company will:

- Liaise with local health promotion of local authority departments to increase information, resources and expertise.
- Establish a physical activity notice board or circulate opportunities to staff via newsletters, pay slips, memos, etc.

***Check that opportunities for exercise classes are provided by professional groups or individuals, or provide employees with information on what they should check when signing up for a class.

Objective

4. Develop formal mechanisms, appropriate to the size and resources of the company, which will make participation in physical activity easier for employees.

Policy Actions

The company will:

- Utilize promotional and motivational posters encouraging employees to make active choices, such as using the stairs in preference to elevators or escalators.
- Provide safe walking route maps to promote walking/jogging during lunch.
- Provide corporate memberships to on-site, private or local authority facilities.
- Establish and support sports teams or activity groups.
- Provide flexible working hours to allow physical activity participation before, during or after the work day.

Objective

5. Promote active commuting to and from work.

Policy Actions

The company will:

- Provide safe storage racks for bicycles.
- Provide showering and/or changing facilities (where feasible).
- Detail or advertise local public transit routes to work.
- Provide cycle mileage reimbursement (preferably equivalent or greater than car mileage reimbursement).
- Provide a car pool or encourage car sharing*

*This may allow people to leave their car and actively commute to work, even if they require the car during working hours.

Objective

6. Consider the impact of new working conditions on employees' health and physical activity participation.

Policy Actions

The company will:

- Ensure that the effect of policy changes on health and physical activity participation is a criterion for assessing new working practices prior to implementation.
- Ensure that new working practices conform to statutory health and safety legislation.
- Ensure that new working practices do not contribute to existing barriers to health and physical activity participation.

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed at 3 months after its implementation, and annually after that.

All new employees will be made aware of the policy and its provisions, via the staff handbook or other information/induction packets.

Bicycle Commuter Benefit – United States National Commuter Policy

On January 1, 2009, the bicycle commuting reimbursement was added to the list of qualified transportation fringe benefits covered in section 132 (f) of the Internal Revenue Service Code (26 U.S.C. sec. 132(f)).

A qualified bicycle commuting reimbursement means any employer, if they chose to do so, may provide a reimbursement of up to \$20 per month for reasonable expenses incurred by the employee in conjunction with their commute to work by bike.

Please note however, that unlike the other qualified transportation fringe benefits, a qualified bicycle commuting reimbursement benefit cannot be funded through employee pre-tax income, nor can an employee receive both the transit and bicycle QTF in the same month.

For exact legal language and more information on this national policy, please see:

<http://www.bikeleague.org/content/bicycle-commuter-benefit>

The following example of this policy is from Design Workshop, a landscape architecture and planning firm with offices throughout the U.S.

Design Workshop & Bicycle Transportation Fringe Benefits

The Bicycle Commuter Act is a simple, equitable solution to put cyclists on the same footing as people who receive qualified transportation benefits for taking an alternative means of transit to and from work.

Design Workshop offers a reimbursement of up to \$20 per month for reasonable expenses incurred by the employee in conjunction with their commute to work by bike.

- The reimbursement is a fringe benefit paid by Design Workshop
- The reimbursement is non-taxable, and excluded from the employees gross income

Reimbursement Requirements:

In order to receive the benefit, employees must adhere to the following requirements:

- Regularly use a bicycle for a substantial portion of travel between work and home. This is defined as a minimum of 75% of workdays
- Not receive any other transportation refund benefit (ie: public transit reimbursements)
- Reimbursements are limited to bicycle commute related expenses, such as bicycle components, repair, or new bicycle purchases
- Reimbursement requests do not exceed \$20 per month and do not roll over from month to month.

Reimbursement Process:

- Employee signs the appropriate section of the DW Monthly Bike Voucher, stating that they rode their bike to work for a minimum of 3 days per week during the respective month.
- Employee turns the Voucher into Finance along with valid receipts for bicycle purchase, repair, parts or storage and submits as part of an expense report.
- Reimbursement requests must adhere to expense report guidelines set forth by Finance

Additional Details:

For a legal, in depth description of the bicycle commuter fringe benefit and its functionality, please review the information provided on the attached link:

<http://www.bikeleague.org/content/bicycle-commuter-benefit>

Fitness Facility or Class Reimbursement Policy Example – T. Rowe Price
http://www.mytrpwellness.com/GuidesForms/Fitness_Reimbursement_Policy.pdf

Fitness Reimbursement Policy

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), individual responsibility can only have its full effect where people have access to a healthy lifestyle, and are supported to make healthy choices. As part of our continued focus on wellness, T. Rowe Price is pleased to provide you with a fitness club reimbursement program to help you achieve your fitness goals.

Eligibility

Regular associates who work 20 hours or more per week are eligible for reimbursement of expenses incurred and paid while employed with T. Rowe Price. Family members (i.e., spouse, children, etc.) of associates are not eligible for this benefit.

Maximum Benefit Allowed

T. Rowe Price will reimburse up to \$300 per calendar year for eligible expenses. These expenses will be reimbursed for the calendar year for which they are incurred, subject to the following:

- Expenses must be incurred and paid for while employed with T. Rowe Price.
- Documentation must be submitted between the December 1st of the preceding year for which the expense applies and the January 31st of the following year.
- Example: Reimbursement requests for 2011 membership expenses will be accepted from Dec. 1, 2010 through Jan. 31, 2012.

Multi-year memberships are reimbursable. A new reimbursement form must be submitted for each individual year of the membership within the time frame specified above. The reimbursement will be prorated based on the membership length.

Reimbursements are paid based on the cost of an individual membership. If a family membership is purchased, the cost of an individual membership to the facility must be included on the reimbursement form.

Expenses incurred in excess of \$300 per calendar year are not eligible to be carried over for reimbursement to the following year.

Taxability

For all reimbursements received under this policy, Federal, State, and FICA taxes are withheld at the applicable rates.

When determining the taxability of the reimbursement, the prevailing tax law at the time of the reimbursement will be applied. The reimbursement will be included as income in the next available pay period, will be subject to tax withholding, and will be included on your W-2 Form at year's end.

Eligible Expenses

Effective January 1, 2011, associates may receive reimbursement for:

- A) Individual membership fees paid to a gym or fitness center that promotes cardiovascular wellness. For a gym/fitness center to be considered eligible, it must be a year-round facility that is managed by fitness staff which promotes cardiovascular wellness and provides at least two pieces of equipment or activities from the following list:

- Circuit Training Equipment
- Stationary bicycle
- Treadmill
- Elliptical cross trainer
- Stepper
- Rowing Machine
- Squash/tennis/racquetball courts
- Pool
- Walking/running group
- Group exercise
- Personal training instruction

B) Series/Session fees paid for group fitness programs that promote aerobic and/or muscle strengthening wellness which are taught by a certified instructor. These fitness classes do not have to be offered in a traditional gym setting to be eligible. Examples include:

- Aerobics (high or low impact)
- Aqua Fitness
- Jazzercise
- Kickboxing
- Pilates
- Spinning
- Step Aerobics
- Yoga
- Zumba

Non-eligible Expenses

Effective January 1, 2011, examples of non-eligible expenses are:

- Clubs
 - o country
 - o golf
 - o seasonal swim
 - o seasonal tennis/racquet ball
- Purchase of exercise/sporting equipment
 - o Mountain/road bicycles
 - o Treadmills, steppers, stationary bicycles
 - o Golf clubs, tennis/racquetball racquets, rollerblades, weights
- Instructional exercise
 - o personal trainers
 - o videotapes
 - o individual lessons
- Sporting apparel, including exercise shoes
- Non-aerobic or muscle-strengthening classes
 - o Ballet
 - o Horseback riding
 - o Fees
 - o Maintenance
 - o Registration/Membership/Start-Up
 - o Card Access/Replacement
 - o Towel Service

If an exercise/fitness program has been prescribed by your physician, please submit those expenses to HR Services for consideration.

Try This West Virginia Mini Grant Pledge – West Virginia

Try This asked grant recipients to pledge to healthy commitments as part of their grant award. Although not specifically a policy, this is an example that other grant-making agencies in the state could follow, so it is included in this section.

We pledge to set a good example

as part of the Try This West Virginia movement

To make healthy community changes, we will create healthy projects and also set a good example in food and physical activity.

Healthy Food: Which of these goals can your team commit to?

_____ At our events, celebrations, and meetings, we will provide healthy alternatives to sugary drinks, processed packaged food, and fried foods.

_____ We want our staff to have healthy options every day. We commit to not purchasing sugary drinks, pop, candy, potato chips, hot dogs, and other unhealthy foods to have on-hand. We will find tasty ways to offer more healthy food and drink for our staff and guests.

_____ We commit to providing healthy foods through our backpack programs, vending machines, and/or other special food projects.

Physical Activity: Which of these can your team commit to?

_____ During meetings, we will have physical activity breaks every half hour or so. It can be as simple as letting people get up and stretch for a minute, to get their brains moving and improve focus and energy level.

_____ We commit to helping organize at least one local event to promote physical activity in our community.

_____ We commit to organizing or supporting a free exercise program for our staff, community or partners (examples: a lunch-time walking club, a running club, a Zumba class, etc.). See the www.trythiswv.com for hundreds of ways to expand physical activity in your community.

Organization name:

Address:

Organization representative:

E-mail:

Phone #:

Organization representative

Date