Working Well: Progress in 2013

Working Well is the comprehensive worksite wellness strategy to establish cultures of healthy living and improved population health in South Carolina. The initiative addresses tobacco use, poor nutrition and physical inactivity among South Carolina employees by focusing on the policies, environments, and benefits available at their workplaces. This document provides a summary of the impact of the project since its beginning in 2011.

Helping South Carolina Improve Population Health
Over the past three years, Working Well has evolved from a hospital-based initiative to a statewide approach to improving population health through a focus on healthy workplaces. With funding from The Duke Endowment and the Healthy South Carolina Initiative, the South Carolina Hospital Association has been able to engage hospitals and businesses to work together to improve the health of communities across the state.

Commitment to a Culture of Wellness
Engagement with the project begins with an Executive Commitment to Establishing a Corporate Culture of Wellness. Senior leaders from 91 South Carolina organizations have put their commitment to wellness into writing and signed on to Working Well. Collectively, these organizations employ over 100,000 South Carolinians. With its focuses on improving workplace policies, environments, and benefits, all employees benefit from workplace participation in Working Well. Patients and visitors are additional indirect beneficiaries of Working Well.

Assessing Progress using WorkHealthy America
Working Well organizations use WorkHealthy America to assess their policies, environments, and benefits related to organizational culture, tobacco use, nutrition and physical activity. The assessment was developed by a team of public health experts based on scientific evidence reviews and practice testing. Upon completion of each new assessment, organizations receive grades, ranging from A’s to F’s, tailored recommendations and action plans to help them move towards the highest standard in employee wellness.

87 South Carolina organizations have completed a baseline assessment using WorkHealthy America, and 52 organizations have reassessed after making changes to their policies, environments, and benefits. Of those who have reassessed, 40 have improved at least one letter grade in nutrition, 39 have improved their grade in tobacco, and 32 have improved their grade in physical activity.

A subset of questions from the WorkHealthy America assessment are publicly reported through the Wellness Quality Scorecard to demonstrate how workplaces across the United States perform on key measures related to implementing evidence-based policies, environments, and benefits. Among the 20 Wellness Quality Scorecard questions, South Carolina is doing better than the national average for 14 indicators related to nutrition, physical activity, tobacco cessation, and creating a culture of wellness.
Culture of Wellness
A key goal of Working Well has been to strengthen existing employee wellness programs by implementing lasting policies, incorporating employee wellness into core organizational values, establishing human and financial capacity for wellness, and evaluating programs. Working Well organizations have made significant improvements in this manner – making wellness a new norm for their workplace. Areas of greatest improvement have included surveying employees about their health and wellness interests, having clearly stated organizational wellness goals, including employee wellness in the organization’s strategic plan, and holding Human Resources staff accountable for health-promoting initiatives. Evaluating the impact of wellness initiatives on employee productivity and healthcare costs continue to be challenging, but there have been positive improvements in this area.

Tobacco-Free People and Places
Since the beginning of the initiative, participating organizations have shown the strongest grades within the tobacco module. Currently 27 SC hospitals and one business have met the highest standard in this area. Efforts to implement tobacco-free worksite policies have been very successful. Organizations participating in Working Well have also shown significant improvements in coaching all tobacco users to quit, assessing tobacco users’ readiness to quit, and periodically following-up with tobacco users to support quit attempts. An increasing number of SC organizations provide FDA-approved tobacco cessation medications and nicotine replacement therapies at no cost, but there is still important work to be done to enhance tobacco cessation benefits available to employees.

Healthy Food Environments
Organizations participating in Working Well have made many improvements that support employee nutrition, and 20 SC hospitals and one business have met the highest standard in providing a healthy food environment for their employees. The use of placement and pricing to promote healthy foods and beverages has been an exciting change in many workplace cafeterias and vending machines. Also, many South Carolina organizations are now implementing contracts with vendors, suppliers and caterers that support good nutrition through the provision of nutrition information and healthy options. In coming years, there is a great opportunity to institutionalize healthy practices by increasing the percentage of employers that adopt a healthy food policy for their workplace.

Access and Opportunity for Physical Activity
Addressing physical inactivity in the workplace has been a new undertaking for many South Carolina organizations. Over the last three years, Working Well organizations have made positive changes to support physically active employees through policy, environmental and benefits changes. Nine SC hospitals and one business have now achieved the highest standard in this area. Organizations have been especially successful providing access to physical activity facilities. There remain opportunities to support physical activity through comprehensive policies and communications that encourage activity during the workday.

Implementation Support
In 2013, the Working Well team made visits to 18 hospitals and 14 businesses across the state of South Carolina. During these visits, wellness teams received tailored technical assistance, customized to the needs and infrastructure of their organization, to support their efforts to improve employee health. In 2013, more than 340 employees from organizations participating in Working Well attended in-person and web-based training events, including state and regional trainings hosted by the South Carolina Hospital Association and Prevention Partners, seven Open Houses hosted by Working Well Centers of Excellence, and 27 web-based trainings. These training events helped participating organizations better understand Working Well and how they can impact population health in South Carolina.

Continuing to Impact Population Health
Working Well has clearly defined the highest standard in worksite wellness in South Carolina over the last three years. In 2014, Working Well will work to broaden its funding base to allow a greater number of organizations to participate in the initiative, while also continuing to increase WorkHealthy America grades among all participating organizations and expand the number of workplaces that reach the Excellence Recognition for receiving A’s for their work addressing tobacco use, good nutrition, physical activity and a culture of wellness.