

Washington County Benefits Committee
April 19, 2011

CONVENED: 1pm

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Present: Karen Crawford, Angi Duyck, Susan Field, Kim Knudeson, Valerie McCraw, Tammy McVean, Susan Pinnock, Charlie Weaver

HUMAN RESOURCES STAFF:

Tracy Kittler, Benefits Specialist
Julee Howard, HR Specialist

CONSULTANTS:

Renee Balsiger, Mercer

1. WELLNESS PROGRAMS [handout]

- Renee of Mercer presented an introduction to Wellness Programs.
 - What is wellness? It can be social involvement and support, physical health, emotional health and well-being, intellectual growth, spiritual foundation. All can relate to the employer on some level: health care costs, productivity, employee satisfaction,
- There is a considerable amount of planning and preparation that precedes the implementation of a complete wellness program.
 - The first step is “Discovery”: during this part of the process inventories/surveys are filled out by the employer, and by all existing health providers (for Washington County this would be Providence, Kaiser, our EAP with Cascade Centers).
 - This allows employers to incorporate any programs that might already exist with health providers; and fold them into the new wellness program.
 - Questions during the discovery process might be:
 - Companies locations and work performed there
 - How is the company organized/structured? Centralized or de-centralized decision-making?
 - What are the top 3 business challenges for the next 3 years or so?
 - Is there a formal wellness strategy documented?
 - How will you know if your program is successful?
 - It is important to remember that a successful wellness program requires a great amount of support at many levels—examples include:
 - Union support
 - Leadership support (from the top down, as well as the bottom up)—the entire organization needs to be ready to embrace a wellness program and encourage participation from all directions.
 - Budgetary support—most programs require significant investments at the beginning, and continuing investments to sustain employee interest and incent employees to participate.

- Staff support—coordination of the program; the program has to have a centralized and focused approach.
- The next step is to answer the “Why?” question.
 - Is Washington County interested in creating/launching a wellness program? If so, why?
 - Employers motivations for wellness programs range from cost savings on health premiums, to creating a healthy work population (because it’s the right thing to do).
 - The intent of the wellness program drives the design and eventual structure of the wellness program.
 - Each employer has to define specific goals associated with the implementation of a wellness program.
- There can be a business case for wellness. Handout page 11 show the range of potential cost savings with a wellness plan, anywhere from 0% rate reduction to 4% rate reduction.
- However, savings are offset by the very significant cost of incentives. Handout page 19 indicates that incentives are generally provided by large employers at each level of wellness participation: completion of a Health Risk Assessment, participating in disease management, or participating in behavior modification programs.
- Incentives range in value from \$150-\$236 for different types of participation. The most successful programs have some if not several, incentives involved.
- The following are key factors that influence the ultimate success of a wellness program:
 - Consistency: in design and organization priorities
 - Establishing specific and measurable goals
 - Integration with current benefits and initiatives
 - Utilization of incentives
 - Communication to drive participation and remind employees of the program and its goals.
- Common gaps in wellness programs/reasons for poor success:
 - No program goals or specific reasons for activities
 - Focus only on activities/meeting, but no ultimate purpose
 - Lack of brand and visibility: pieces of programs are tied together, but not integrated.
 - Little accountability: no one owns or maintains constant performance of the program.
 - Lack of measurable results.
- Next steps toward a wellness program are completing inventories for both the client and vendors.
- After that, a Predictive Risk Analysis is completed. The University of Michigan analyses risk factors for the Washington County population based on census data.
- From there, any need for wellness initiatives can be tailored to Washington County.

2. ACTION ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

- No open action items at this time.

3. **NEXT MEETING**, May meeting is cancelled due to Open Enrollment; June meeting will be on as regularly scheduled: **Tuesday, June 21, 2011, 1pm-4pm**

4. **COMMENTS**

The following comments were made by committee members:

- “There is currently no incentive to keep sick leave...can this be part of a wellness program?”
 - Renee of Mercer answered, yes, it can be. You can tie in important employer-specific issues like this at the discovery level. If Washington County has a particular concern over sick leave usage, incentives for retaining sick leave can be explored. Of course, while we’d want to incent employees not to abuse sick leave, we don’t want to encourage them to come to work sick, either. That can be a fine line.
- “How do incentives work in public sector—Washington County will not send \$270 cash to employees for participating in a wellness program, realistically?”
 - Generally employees see a reduction in premium cost share. When employees contribute to premiums, the contributions can be a smaller percentage if the employee participates in wellness activities.
 - An example of a local public sector entity is one that uses a point system. Employees receive points for participating in designated wellness activities, once they have reached a certain point threshold; they qualify for the premium reduction.
- “It has been hard to move forward with any wellness initiatives at the Committee level, as we haven’t seen any policy-makers present to inform us what is acceptable in terms of a program.”
 - Although Stephanie Reitmajer could not attend this meeting, she now offers comment on this issue. Washington County does support a wellness program. The Human Resources Division will be investing staff resources to start wellness initiatives this next fiscal year (2011-2012). We will work with the committee to plan these. Other budgetary resources may be available in future years, but not this coming year.
- “What are other public sector entities offering?”
 - Many use their current vendors and present claims experience and history at the committee level. Committees are then informed about illness trends/diseases within their populations.
 - Some plan activities/campaigns of awareness around these noted illnesses.
 - Others have very specifically branded their wellness programs
 - Unfortunately, public sector does not lend itself to incentives much, as incentives are expensive.