



CommonHealth -- Virginia's Employee Wellness Program

1. Brief Program Description. *CommonHealth* ensures comprehensive and timely health topics with steps for followup initiatives for employees after each presentation. Programs are developed to reach the Governor's state-wide health initiative to make Virginia's employees the healthiest in the nation. This year is the 30th year of the program, and we strive for continuous improvement in content, resources, and varied learning delivery systems to reach more employees and help promote increased healthy behaviors. The health education campaigns can reach over 100,000 employees at more than 600 state agencies. Coordinators also serve almost 400 local government agencies through The Local Choice health benefits program.

CommonHealth focuses on an increased awareness of preventable medical conditions as well as providing health education on chronic health issues. Regional Coordinators present health education campaigns on two specific health issues that are informative and interactive. In addition, presentations of topics are offered to meet the special needs of some employees. The nine home-based Regional Coordinators presents the health campaigns at the agency location's facility. Formats include small and large group presentations, learning stations at health fairs, and desk-to-desk visits.

Programs are developed by members of the team to reflect the latest science and medical innovations. An innovation in *CommonHealth* communications is the use of *Weekly WellNotes*, which are brief email messages on the current program. These messages contain additional resources and personal challenges to keep the program fresh over the six-month program. The *CommonHealth* Facebook page highlights healthy milestones by employees and upcoming wellness events.

To encourage enduring engagement in *CommonHealth* programs, we launched *CommonHealth Workplace Wellness Certification Criteria* (35 awarded) and *Wellness Champions* (10 awarded) to acknowledge agencies and individuals that expand the culture of wellness in the work they do every day.

Recent programs focused on recognizing the signs of stroke, stress management, including workplace stress, and *Growing Younger*, a program to help employees age well.



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2. **How long has this program been operational (month and year)?** *CommonHealth* is 30 years old, beginning as an outsourced program in September 1986, and the program has grown and evolved considerably after it was brought in house in July 2008.
3. **Why was this program created? (What problem[s] or issues does it address?)** It was designed to mitigate increasing costs of health insurance claims. Overall, increased employee wellness benefits productivity and morale by addressing issues related to absenteeism and disengaged employees. The program educates employees on their benefits including HR-related opportunities such as the Employee Dispute Resolution program, Workers Compensation classes, and new initiatives and benefits offered through the Office of Health Benefits.
4. **Why is this program a new and creative method?** *CommonHealth* has been a cutting edge program from the beginning and continues to be contemporary and relevant due to the level of flexibility it offers to meet the changing needs of employees and the agencies for which they work. *CommonHealth* uses the advantages of presenting wellness topics in person, on video, and online. As the workforce has evolved and newer employees communicate via social media, we use Facebook, quick email postings, and an interactive website to reach these employees where they work and live. Facebook (over 600 hits per week) provides a reliable place to post photos and offer challenges to encourage active participation. New ideas and features are launched swiftly with these methods. We recently launched a tool that invited employees to join a group of people interested in a specific topic. This facilitates sending targeted messages with ease to an interested group of employees.

A toolkit was developed with a variety of challenges and informational materials for the agency coordinators to use at their convenience to continue growing a culture of wellness on their own unique organizational foundation. The toolkit was loaded onto thumb drives for the agency coordinators to make it quick and easy to use. We apply technology and creativity to increase employee engagement.

5. **What were the program's start-up costs?** A program manager was hired as well as nine regional *CommonHealth* Educators (current annual cost is ~\$500,000 plus benefits). These educators share a total of more than 220 years of



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health and wellness educational experience, so little startup training was required. Each regional educator is home based and provided with a laptop, cell phone, and other office equipment. Rental cars and personal cars are used to travel to client locations. A contract with Enterprise provided a discounted rate for longer trips; personal cars are used for shorter trips. Each educator set up their home offices in their homes, while phone lines, Email, and VPN services were provided to stay connected with each other and their clients. Since *CommonHealth* educators were hired in the region they would serve, there were no relocation costs associated with the startup costs.

- 6. What are the program's operational costs?** Ongoing operational costs are similar to other offices; the state pays for phone usage, email and texting charges. Materials to develop presentations for each program are relatively small. Portable presentation boards were purchased and display items were created and printed at the main office. Program development involved research and communications through means in place for all employees. Incentives are purchased that relate to the program content. With an average reach of 20,000 to 30,000 employees, the cost for incentives is modest and cost about \$40,000 to \$45,000 per year. Handouts or marketing materials are printed at the state correctional facilities at a cost far less than using small individual copiers. Laptops and software are paid to VITA, the state agency managing software and hardware costs. Travel costs are by personal or rental cars. Occasionally overnight travel requires additional costs. DHRM pays salaries and fringes for the nine educators.
- 7. How is this program funded?** *CommonHealth* is funded by the Health Insurance Fund (HIF) from the Office of Health Benefits (DHRM). These are non-general funds.
- 8. Did this program originate in your state?** Yes, the *CommonHealth* program was originally outsourced by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1986 and was re-vamped and brought in-house in 2008 at a cost savings of \$4.5 million annually. The original program has been streamlined to save money and has grown through diversification and specialization of duties across the team. 2016 marks our 30th year of continual efforts to make Virginia's employees healthier, reduce health care claims and decrease absenteeism.



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- 9. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If yes, how does this program differ?** There are other employee wellness programs in many other states and in the private sector, but we are not aware of any that offer the level of face-to-face contacts and direct personalized delivery service that we offer. Through in-person health education and wellness presentations as well as our multiple alternative formats for accessibility we ensure that employees have access regardless of their region and population size, work environment, and type of work load they have.
- 10. How do you measure the success of this program?** Our customer service satisfaction surveys are always at 93% or higher level of satisfaction. Any HR initiative that is promoted by *CommonHealth* has seen growth. Evidence from employees of improved health because of one of *CommonHealth's* campaigns is often shared with us personally or through our Facebook page or email as success stories. It is difficult to determine the full financial impact of a wellness program due to the difficulty of analyzing aggregate health claims data and the impact of the program on employees for the long term. Employees participating in *CommonHealth* programs and wellness challenges appreciate state government's desire to increase employee wellness, which improves overall employee morale. *CommonHealth* educates employees about the danger of obesity and comorbidities, using programs focused on healthy weight, diet, exercise, and making better choices. Bariatric surgeries have decreased from 83% since 2010. After a CommonHealth program on Type I diabetes in 2010 was presented in conjunction with a condition care program for members with diabetes or pre-diabetes, 2,903 members participated in the diabetic VBID program with 92% having an HbA1C test.
- 11. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?** In its inception with a contracted agency, the program required a membership fee paid by both the employee and the agency, but now the program is free to employees and agencies, which allows us to be more accessible. Through the use of technology we have extended our reach to include 24/7 facilities and those that do not have access to our face-to-face programs.

We are more closely aligned with the Dept. of Human Resource Management, the Office of Health Benefits, and the Governor's Strategic initiatives. We optimize our resources and human capital to make the program effective, contemporary, and flexible in delivery for the diverse operations and locations of state employees. We frequently



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receive inquiries from other states and government agencies about the *CommonHealth* program. Our comprehensive website is often the stimulus for inquiries about our program and current and previous wellness topics.