

# On the road to wellness... the Delaware Way

*Paying for health care before you really need it may not seem like a sound business decision, but in Delaware it just makes good sense.*

**D**elaWELL is a one-of-a-kind innovative approach to addressing the alarming rise in health care costs in our nation. The program is offered free-of-charge to state employees and their eligible dependents and assesses health risks, provides confidential personalized feedback and coaching intervention strategies that target lifestyle topics such as back care, blood pressure management, exercise, nutrition and stress management in an effort to reduce health care costs by reducing the cost of future claims.

Our state covers approximately 110,000 lives, including state employees, their family members and those who have retired from the state system. With our current estimated health care expenditures for FY08 nearing \$433 million, we launched this program with the mindset of not only controlling health care costs, but also with the philosophy that a healthy workforce is a more productive workforce.

We have added new components to the program in the past year such as onsite biometric screenings and Weight Watchers® offerings to help our most valuable asset — our workforce — meet their personal goals for a healthy and happy life.



**2008 Rooney Award for Innovative State Human Resource Management  
APPLICATION**

**Program Title:** DelaWELL

**State and Agency:** State of Delaware Office of Management and Budget

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**1. Please provide a brief description of the program.**

DelaWELL is a one-of-a-kind innovative approach to addressing the rising cost of health care in our nation. The State of Delaware offers the program free-of-charge to state employees and their eligible dependents. Our goal is to encourage employees to take a proactive approach to their health in an effort to reduce the cost of future insurance claims. We view our employees as the state's most valuable asset which is why it makes sense for us to pay for health care for them now... before they really need it!

We started our program out small and then built on successes along the way. In 2003, we launched our first 100-person pilot program, Health Rewards, based on successful private-sector models. Participants underwent a health assessment including a complete health history, resting and exercise blood pressure, cholesterol level check, body composition and strength testing. Immediate results from the screenings reported high-risk conditions that may be present but not yet detected. All participants also received an exercise recommendation to improve physical outcomes in all risk areas. They received feedback and received a reassessment after one year.

After the initial pilot, we expanded the program to include 1,500 participants. Testing centers were set up in each county for assessments and "fit stop sessions." The fit stops included two voluntary sessions with exercise physiologists and each session targeted a specific cardio-metabolic risk factor. Participants were randomly placed into three intervention groups with different assessment levels. Participants showed a significant reduction in percentage of body fat, systolic

and diastolic blood pressure, total cholesterol, increase in HDL (the good cholesterol) and improvements in fitness levels. The state also saw a total trended healthcare savings of approximately \$450,000 based on reductions in hypertension and emergency room visits from the Health Rewards program.

In April 2007, we launched DelaWELL which was open to 40,000 eligible state employees and dependents enrolled in one of our group health plans. DelaWELL began with a confidential health risk assessment, followed by personalized lifestyle and disease management tools including wellness coaches and an online resource with topics ranging from living with chronic conditions, a drug reference guide and health resources for different demographics including men, women, children, older adults and pregnant women.

In the spring and fall of 2007, the Office of Management and Budget helped organize a 5K Governor's Cup walk/run with Governor Ruth Ann Minner, which attracted more than 1,000 participants collectively.

On February 14, 2008, the State of Delaware launched DelaWELL Year Two which includes new initiatives such as onsite biometric screenings and up to 100 percent reimbursement for Weight Watchers<sup>®</sup> offerings which is available to employees, spouses, and dependents over the age of 18 who are covered through the state's group health plan.

In response to feedback from our employee Health Risk Assessments, the State of Delaware launched onsite comprehensive biometric screenings for all state employees. These screenings include blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose. In addition, state employees will receive a \$100 pre-tax incentive when they attend a biometric screening and complete their Health Risk Assessment by May 30, 2008.

2. **How long has this program been operational (month and year)?** February 2007

3. **Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?**

The State of Delaware covers approximately 110,000 lives, including state employees, their family

members and those who have retired from the state system. Our current estimated healthcare expenditures for fiscal year 2008 are \$433 million. As our state, along with the nation, faces the continued trend of rising health care costs, it was imperative that we came up with a more proactive plan to ensure a healthier workforce. By taking this approach to wellness, we hoped to drive down the cost of healthcare by reducing the cost of future claims.

4. **Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?** Our program targets employees who may have certain risk factors BEFORE they develop chronic conditions that could have been prevented. We have learned from this program that while it may seem unusual to pay for healthcare before a person gets sick, it is a sound investment on the future health and wellness of our most important asset — our workforce. The State of Delaware is the first to launch such a multi-faceted program which is available to more than 65,000 individuals who can improve and maintain their health through targeted intervention strategies.

5. **What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place).** The State Employee Benefits Committee (SEBC) authorized the program budget through the Employee Health Fund. The SEBC approved \$1.4 million over a two-year period, plus an additional \$500,000 for incentives. Two full-time employees were hired and dedicated exclusively to state wellness initiatives. In addition, three full-time employees were redeployed bringing the current wellness team count to five employees.

6. **What are the program's annual operational costs?** We have contractual agreements with two vendors to provide online health assessments and other tools and cardio metabolic screenings. We also provide incentives, promotional items and market the program with paycheck stuffers, mass e-mails, direct mail, posters, press releases and health fairs. All of the annual costs are paid out of the Employee Health Fund (see question 5).

7. **How is the program funded?** See question 5

**8. Did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.** Yes, this comprehensive wellness program is unique to Delaware, and many other states have since asked for our guidance on how we have been so successful in implementing Health Rewards and now DelaWELL. While some states are getting involved with employee wellness programs, Delaware leads the way when it comes to the comprehensive wellness services and programs it offers.

**9. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?** The DelaWELL program has been lauded as a model for other states who are interested in wellness initiatives. Our approach to paying for healthcare before you really need it, has proven effective in driving down the cost of healthcare by reducing the amount of future claims. Some states are beginning to offer wellness programs, but to our knowledge, none are as comprehensive in nature.

**10. How do you measure the success of the program?** After employees complete the online Health Risk Assessment, the anonymous is evaluated to identify new opportunities for disease and health management programming and to define topics for future health seminars. We also use the data to measure changes in health behaviors as a result of certain program components. More than 8,000 state employees filled out their HRA in the first year, and more than 1,000 participated in two DelaWELL walk/runs. In addition, we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback and response for year two programs of DelaWELL including Weight Watchers® and the onsite biometric screenings.

**11. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?** See above, but we initially started with a pilot program with 100 individuals, evaluated successes and needs, and today we have the comprehensive DelaWELL initiative that is available to more than 65,000 individuals and their dependents.