



HENNEPIN COUNTY CASE STUDY: CREATING A CULTURE OF HEALTH



Purpose of Project

The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO), in collaboration with workplace wellness experts, has selected companies from a variety of industries and business types to participate in a culture of health case-study project. These case studies focus on employers that have developed and fostered a healthy culture in their workforce—one that is intentionally designed with elements and indicators that support employee health and well-being. The case studies were based on HERO's definition and elements of a culture of health. The case studies were based on HERO's **definition and elements** of a culture of health.

Organization Overview

Hennepin County, founded in 1852, is the largest of 87 counties in Minnesota with 1.2 million residents living within its 607 square miles. Minneapolis and 44 other cities are located in Hennepin County. The County includes 46 municipalities and 22 school districts. As a county government, Hennepin has a diverse employee base with more than 8,000 employees working in more than 135 locations throughout the county.

According to the Hennepin County website, the county's mission is "to enhance the health, safety and quality of life of our residents and communities in a respectful, efficient and fiscally responsible way." The county also has the following overarching goals:

- **Healthy**—people are healthy, have access to quality health care, and live in a clean environment
- **Protected and Safe**—people are safe from harm through prevention, early intervention and treatment services, and through enhanced public safety
- **Self-Reliant**—people achieve success with the support of essential services, have access to affordable housing, and opportunities for life-long learning

- **Assured Due Process**—people are assured equal protection of the laws through an adversarial and respectful system designed to ensure fairness and reliability in the ascertainment of liability, guilt, and innocence
- **Mobile**—people and goods move easily and safely through the county and region via an integrated system of transportation

Program Background

The Hennepin County wellness program is known as Hennepin County HealthWorks. Employee wellness has long been a focus for the county. The first health promotion program was started in 1982. In 1996, the program was rebranded from Well Weighs to HealthWorks, and in 2002 the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners provided funds to hire additional staff to support the growing program.

The HealthWorks program mission statement is "to provide opportunities for employees, dependents, and retirees to enhance their health and well-being in a holistic and respectful manner." The program connects Hennepin County employees, retirees, and dependents with wellness programs and services

to help them improve their health. Hennepin County HealthWorks focuses on the physical, emotional, financial, and social aspects of health and provides programs, resources, and activities relating to all of these dimensions of well-being.

Key components of the program include:



Enhancing the health, safety and quality of life of our residents and communities in a respectful, efficient and fiscally responsible way.

- Health education sessions led by Hennepin County HealthWorks, Hennepin County Health & Safety Division, outside vendors, or physicians from the Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC).
- Clinical programs including biometric screenings, flu shot clinics, on-site visits with employee assistance program providers, and face-to-face health coaching.
- The Be Well Clinic offers convenient on-site access to healthcare services including primary care, integrative health, and a full-service pharmacy for employees, covered adult dependents, and retirees. The Be Well Clinic opened in 2006 and is currently operated by HCMC.
- Trade Time for Fitness program, through which employees can use sick time or paid time off for reimbursements on fitness and wellness expenses. The most common requests are for fitness club memberships, fitness equipment, sporting leagues, personal trainers and fitness and exercise classes.

Hennepin County also offers a two-tiered health incentive for participation in the wellness program. Health plan-covered employees, spouses, and retirees



are eligible to have their office visit co-pays reduced to \$15 by participating in the program. For several years, the program steps were to complete a health risk assessment and earn two additional wellness

credits. In 2017, the county moved to a point-based system in which participants must earn 30 total wellness points, by completing the annual health assessment

and participating in various on-site and online wellness activities throughout the year, to earn the reduced co-pay. Currently the county is piloting an additional incentive tier in which employees who earn 50 wellness points receive weekly discounts for healthy foods at specific retailers. The discounts can be used by the employee's entire family. Employees, spouses, and retirees not enrolled in benefits are also eligible to participate in the wellness programs but do not earn the incentives.

Program Background

Hennepin County's commitment to the health and wellness of their employees includes many culture of health elements, best summarized by the following:

Organizational Resource Allocation and Commitment

Hennepin County has five full-time employees dedicated to the HealthWorks program. Within the organizational structure, the HealthWorks work unit falls under benefits in human resources. The program has significant support from county administration and the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners; it is a priority within the organization, as shown by HealthWorks being an independent county work unit. The county also provides adequate funding for the programs and resources offered to their employees throughout the year.

The HealthWorks team is composed of individuals with backgrounds in exercise physiology, health promotion,

psychology, human resources, community health, data science, and organizational behavior change. This team of subject-matter experts provides direct services to employees, oversees program design and implementation, and collaborates with work units throughout the county to customize programs.

Employee Involvement and Empowerment

Hennepin County HealthWorks seeks to meet employees where they are on their personal health journey. To this end, one way the HealthWorks team communicates with county employees is through a HealthWorks email box which allows employees to comment on programs and services. When surveys are conducted, the results are reviewed carefully and changes are made. If a request cannot be accommodated, the HealthWorks team contacts the employee with an explanation. If several employees have made similar requests, a broad communication will be sent to employees.

To illustrate further, Hennepin County recently selected a wellness vendor to support the HealthWorks program, and various departmental employees assisted in the decision by participating in the vendor interviews. The HealthWorks team also contacted employees to test various wellness platforms and provide feedback, which informed vendor selection. This group of testers included employees from organizational units such as Central Mobile Equipment, Public Health, Sheriff, County Attorney, Forensics, Administration, Human Services, Corrections, Real Estate and Resident Services, and others. Soliciting opinions from a representative sample of employees was important to Hennepin County to find the most well-suited wellness partner.



Another item of note is the county's employee recognition program. Among the awards provided each year, one is specifically for well-being. Employees can be nominated for actions taken to improve workplace health culture. Including a well-being award for employee recognition further underscores the county's dedication to improving employees' health.

Supportive Built Environment

Hennepin County has long focused on improving the environment in which employees and residents live and work to be more conducive to a healthy lifestyle. Some examples:

- Hennepin County strives to make riding a bicycle a routine part of daily life for all citizens. As part of this countywide effort, the HealthWorks team supported Facilities Services in installing bicycle racks around county buildings. Besides encouraging county employees to bike to work, this initiative also encourages residents to ride for recreation and fitness. The county also provides information on safe routes and bike maps to ensure safety.
- In newer county buildings, meditation or "quiet rooms" and nursing rooms are being integrated into designs. Meditation rooms have minimal furniture, and food or drink are not permitted inside. Some departments have set up rooms exclusively for use by their employees. Many county buildings have breastfeeding rooms, each with its own amenities. A listing of locations and amenities is readily available to employees.
- The county is striving to increase use of stairs within buildings, as presently some buildings have inaccessible stairwells. In one such building, the stairs were locked and used only as a fire escape. The HealthWorks team collaborated with Hennepin

County Administration and Facility Services to open the stairwells to employees. Besides making stairs accessible, signs and prompts are also used to encourage people to climb stairs. Flyers may be posted near elevators, and posters hung in stairwells. In some county buildings, communication challenges people to count steps while climbing a flight of stairs to add a fun element to this activity. Architects are designing newer buildings with elevators located behind stairs.



Policies

The county has established policies to better align the organizational culture with wellness goals. There are three primary policies for which HealthWorks is responsible:

- Hennepin County is on the leading edge of public sector employers relative to workplace ergonomics. In 1998, the county carried out an ergonomic policy to reverse an increase in musculoskeletal injuries related to office and computer work. In collaboration with the Health & Safety and Worker's Compensation departments, the county set up at least one height-adjustable work station available to employees and provided training and education about posture, task rotation, and office setup. Once sit-to-stand workstations were more readily available, they became part of the standard office layout. Today, whenever possible, sit-to-stand desks replace fixed-height furniture.
- In 2009, the county adopted the Active Living policy to improve the health of county employees and residents by making the county more walkable and bikeable through policy, systems, and environmental change.
- In 2009, the county also adopted the Complete Streets policy to develop and maintain a safe, efficient, and environmentally sound county transportation system and to support Active Living—adding physical activity into daily routines through activities such as biking, walking, or taking transit. As

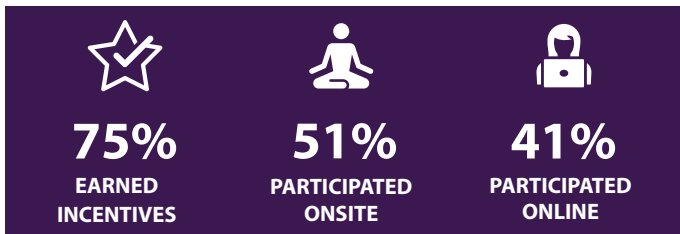
a result, the county has been recognized as a Bicycle Friendly Community and Bicycle Friendly Business by the League of American Bicyclists.

- The County enacted a no-tobacco policy in 2011, which banned the use of tobacco products on county property. As part of this initiative, the county had a communication campaign reminding employees and the public of the tobacco-cessation programs available.
- A nutrition policy was updated in 2017. It requires 75% of vending machine food to be healthy, amended from the 2014 policy in which 50% of the foods were required to be healthy. The policy mandates low-fat, low-sugar, and low-salt products and was intended to benefit employees and visitors to the buildings. The committee that developed the policy also decided to remove vending machines from some buildings located in areas with greater access to healthy food options, such as downtown areas. In other buildings, the number of vending machines was significantly reduced to encourage employees to find healthier options. As part of the healthy nutrition initiative, the county also instituted a guideline in which all meetings and potluck gatherings should include healthy options.

External Community Connections and Altruism

As a county government, Hennepin has the opportunity to use multiple work units in planning and promoting health promotion initiatives for county employees and residents. Some examples are below:

- Employees are eligible for a discounted subscription to the Nice Ride Minnesota Bike Sharing Program. The program has more than 1,800 bikes available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from more than 200 locations in Minneapolis and St. Paul during the months of May through October.
- HealthWorks collaborates in the organization of the Bike Walk Week Twin Cities each spring.
- Employees participate in the annual Hennepin 5K walk/run, organized by an interdepartmental committee.
- The entire county—employees and residents—is invited to participate in the annual Hennepin County “Step to It” program sponsored by Hennepin County Public Health. The event encourages residents to track their physical activity.
- HealthWorks has an interdepartmental committee dedicated to finding programs, campaigns, and partnerships supporting well-being that can be promoted to Hennepin County employees.



Key Results

Each year from 2014 to 2016, between 10,000 and 11,000 Hennepin County employees, spouses, and retirees were eligible to participate in the HealthWorks program and earn the health plan incentive. During this time, an average of 75% of eligible individuals earned the incentive. Also during these years, on average, among eligible participants:

- 51% attended on-site events
- 41% completed online events
- 6% participate in the Hennepin 5K race
- 4% purchased Nice Ride subscriptions with the county discount
- 12% had on-site biometric screenings

- 17% had an on-site flu shot

Through the Trade Time for Fitness program, Hennepin County has consistently reimbursed employees significant funds to offset personal out-of-pocket cost for fitness and wellness-related expenses. Employees are eligible to file claims throughout the year and turn in sick time and paid time off in exchange for these reimbursements. Trade Time for Fitness not only promotes employee and family health and fitness, but it also reduces county costs when employees retire and request severance pay.

Results of this program over the past 3 years.			
	2014	2015	2016
# Who Received Reimbursement	1,173	1,255	1,250
# of Claims Paid	5,965	5,432	5,391
Amount Reimbursed	\$1,240,217	\$1,356,939	\$1,353,545

Lessons Learned

A key lesson for the HealthWorks team was to listen to employees before making recommendations or carrying out initiatives. As subject-matter experts, the team creates content for educational programs, communication and other wellness initiatives. Before developing content or presenting to employees, the team realized it is important to understand where employees are in their personal health journey and to learn about the individuals as employees of Hennepin County by asking the following questions:

- What is work life like for these employees?
- What is the work environment?
- What is the culture within the department or work unit?
- What is important to these employees about the topic at hand?

As the experts, the HealthWorks team has insight into best practices, but without talking to employees, the information cannot be translated or applied effectively for employees. The HealthWorks team often customizes

initiatives for individual departments and work units, so they make a conscious effort to study and listen to everyone involved before developing program content.

Conclusion

Hennepin County HealthWorks was created to provide opportunities for county employees, dependents, and retirees to improve their health and well-being. The HealthWorks program supports the county's mission and overarching goals for residents to be healthy, have access to quality health care, and live in a clean environment through health promotion policies and programs. Interdepartmental collaboration and partnership with community groups also allows for progress toward these goals.

Hennepin County has long fostered a supportive work environment inclusive of several culture of health elements. The program is a priority to the Hennepin County Administration and Board of Commissioners who provide necessary funding for a variety of programs. Employees are encouraged to follow their own personal journey and get involved in ways that are most meaningful to them. The HealthWorks team strives to understand employees and what is most important to them to create effective programs. As a large employer with a diverse and geographically dispersed employee population, Hennepin County has established a wellness program that other organizations may reference to see best practices at work.



Contributors to this Case Study

This case study is a product of the HERO Culture of Health (CoH) Study Committee and its Values of Culture Work Group. The CoH Study Committee was created to establish a widely accepted definition of a healthy culture to build consensus and understanding of its value when supporting the health and well-being of a population. Case study interviews and development of this report was led by HERO staff and members of the CoH Study Committee. HERO would like to extend a special thank you to the Centers for Disease Control for additional support during the editing process.

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The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) is a national non-profit dedicated to identifying and sharing best practices in the field of workplace health and wellbeing that improves the health and well-being of workers, their spouses, dependents and retirees. HERO was established over 20 years ago and is a member driven organization where learning opportunities and research are led by committees. HERO's work focuses on sharing best practices, advocating for improvements in the field, and providing practical solutions for employers who share HERO's commitment to health and well-being for employees, families and communities.