

# Workplace Health

As the World Health Organization points out, our workplaces have an important effect on us, influencing “the physical, mental, economic and social well-being of workers and in turn the health of their families, communities and society.” Workplaces thus offer an ideal opportunity to promote better health. The LMP’s Workplace and Community Health Program was designed to take advantage of that opportunity. The program partners with employers and 1199SEIU to develop healthy worksite and community programs for workers. It also provides technical support to healthcare organizations working to improve the health and wellness of their staff.

## Healthcare Workers Have More Health Problems

Did you know that people who work in the healthcare industry are more likely to suffer from health problems, use more medical services, and have higher healthcare expenses than the average US worker? **Compared to the US workforce as a whole, people who work in hospitals are...**

- **46%** more likely to be obese
- **20%** more likely to suffer from depression
- **12%** more likely to be diagnosed with asthma<sup>1</sup>

## How Are 1199SEIU Members Affected?

Members of 1199SEIU work in some of the world’s finest health care facilities, dedicating themselves to providing quality care and service to their patients. They work on the front lines of hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, home care and pharmacies to save lives and to care for the sick, elderly and disabled. Yet, assuming that they mirror the general adult population in New York State and New York City, 1199SEIU members likely suffer from high rates of preventable conditions and diseases. Applying population health trends documented in the research literature, it is estimated that more than 64,000 members may be at an unhealthy weight (overweight or obese), placing them at risk for diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and many other preventable health problems.<sup>2</sup>

What can be done to care for our caregivers? How can we ensure that 1199SEIU members work in conditions that promote health and wellness and that they have the resources they need to prevent or better manage chronic disease? Those are questions that 1199SEIU and the League of Voluntary Hospitals and Homes asked when they began to collaborate on promoting healthy lifestyles, advancing occupational safety and combating chronic conditions and diseases. The LMP’s Workplace and Community Health Program is part of this joint initiative.

## How Can You Promote Best Practices?



Labor and management at your organization should work collaboratively to establish policies and plan, implement, and promote activities and programs to promote wellness. Begin by establishing a **workplace wellness committee**, co-chaired by labor and management, to provide guidance for all workplace health promotion and employee engagement activities. A wellness committee should operate with a committee charter, regular meetings and clear roles and responsibilities.

For a comprehensive guide on how to implement best practices—many of them free or low-cost—consult *From Evidence to Practice: Workplace Wellness that Works*.<sup>3</sup>

Here are some best practices for your committee to consider:

### Physical Activity

- Post signs at elevators, stairwell entrances and exits that encourage employees to use the stairs
- Provide well-lit, accessible stairwells
- Provide bicycle racks, outdoor space designated for recreation or exercise, and an on-site exercise facility
- Offer fitness assessments, group fitness classes, and physical activity clubs (e.g., walking)

<sup>1</sup>Taylor M, Bithoney W. 10 Steps to Developing a Culture of Health for Hospital and Health System Employers. Truven Health Analytics. Oct. 2012.

<sup>2</sup>Overweight/obesity estimate based on the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2014 Community Health Survey. Estimated number of 1199SEIU members in metro NY drawn from 2012 National Benefit Fund Report.

<sup>3</sup>Johns Hopkins School of Public Health & Transamerica Center for Health Studies, *From Evidence to Practice: Workplace Wellness that Works*, 2015. <https://www.transamericacenterforhealthstudies.org/docs/default-source/wellness-page/from-evidence-to-practice---workplace-wellness-that-works.pdf>

- Encourage workers to take walking breaks and stretch throughout the day
- Provide employees with pedometers and low-cost exercise equipment

**Tobacco Cessation**

- Encourage employees to use their health benefits, including tobacco cessation coaching through the National Benefit Fund’s Nurse Help Line (1-866-935-1199)
- Promote free tobacco cessation programs (e.g., 1-800-QUIT NOW, www.smokefree.gov; 1-866-NY-QUITS, www.nysmokefree.com)

**Nutrition & Weight Management**

- Develop a written policy for what constitutes healthy food and beverage options, including limiting unhealthy options
- Make at least 75% of the food and beverage choices available in cafeterias and vending machines healthy options and identify them with signs or symbols
- Provide nutritional information on sodium, calories, carbohydrates, and added sugars for items sold in the workplace
- Subsidize or provide discounts on healthier foods and beverages sold in the workplace
- Offer healthy food options at meetings and functions
- Consult the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative for resources (New

York City Department of Health, Healthy Hospital Food Initiative. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/healthy-hospital-food-initiatives.page>)

- Provide free or subsidized self-management programs for healthy eating (e.g., Weight Watchers)

**Stress Management, Substance Abuse & Depression**

- Provide dedicated space where employees can engage in relaxation activities (e.g., meditation, yoga)
- Provide stress management programs
- Promote the Child Care Fund offerings, counseling programs, and other programs offered through 1199SEIU Funds or insurance
- Provide access to online or paper self-assessment depression screening tools and employee assistance programs (EAPs)
- Promote the Member Assistance Program available to 1199 members (646) 473-6900

**Blood Pressure, Cholesterol and Diabetes Management**

- Provide health risk assessments and screening to all employees and refer employees with high blood pressure/prehypertension, diabetes/prediabetes and/or high cholesterol to a healthcare provider
- Provide one-on-one or group lifestyle counseling and follow-up monitoring for these employees

**HEALTHY WORKPLACE SPOTLIGHT: Mount Sinai Beth Israel and 1199SEIU Help Workers Reduce Diabetes Risk**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 37% of American adults over the age of 20 have prediabetes. Applying this prevalence rate to the number of 1199SEIU members in metro New York suggests that approximately 41,000 may have prediabetes.<sup>4</sup> People with prediabetes have elevated blood glucose levels (but not high enough to be diagnosed with diabetes), and are at increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and other serious health problems.

To help 1199SEIU members and other hospital employees with prediabetes, the Workplace and Community Health Program launched a Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) in partnership with 1199SEIU and Mount Sinai Beth Israel in fall 2015. The DPP, a research-based,



lifestyle change program based on a curriculum developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), strives to help people with prediabetes lose 5% to 7% of their body weight by encouraging healthier eating habits and at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week. The CDC program has excellent outcomes, lowering the risk of developing diabetes by 58%.

Six DPP groups have launched at Mount Sinai Beth Israel. Serving both union members and management, the groups have a total of 97 employees, all participating for a year. During the first six months, lifestyle coaches deliver 16 modules that focus on increasing and tracking physical activity, eating well and tracking food intake, caloric balance, managing stress, coping with triggers and getting support for a healthy lifestyle. In the second six months of the program, coaches provide at least six additional modules addressing challenges such as stalls in weight loss and getting off track with eating or fitness goals. Preliminary data is promising. Of the participants who attended four or more groups, 78% lost weight. Participants lost 462 pounds in total, for an average weight loss of over seven pounds.

<sup>4</sup>Prediabetes prevalence is based on data from the 2014 National Diabetes Statistics Report. An estimate of the number of 1199SEIU members in metro New York was taken from the 2012 National Benefit Fund report.