Why Should State Legislators Be Concerned?

- **Preventable chronic diseases cost employers.** On average, employers in 2005 spent about $18,000 per employee per year for all costs related to health and lost productivity. Chronic diseases account for more than 75 percent of the $2 trillion spent annually on health care in the United States.

- **Most Americans get their health insurance coverage through work.** About 80 percent of Americans receive health care coverage through employer-based benefits and services. That means nearly 159 million American workers and their families under age 65 get their health insurance coverage from employers. Employers also cover 15 million Americans age 65 and older.

- **Workplace health programs can help make healthy choices easier and prevent chronic diseases.** Employers can improve the health and productivity of their employees and save on health care costs through workplace health programs. Programs can include:
  - Providing access to healthier food choices in cafeterias or vending machines;
  - Offering opportunities for physical activity;
  - Providing tobacco-free work environments;
  - Offering information about preventive health services; and
  - Making preventive services such as cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure screenings available at work.

- **Research shows that workplace health programs work.** According to comprehensive research, workplace health promotion programs can lead to more than 25 percent reductions in absenteeism, health care costs and disability/workers' compensation costs.

- **Investments bring returns.** Comprehensive workplace health promotion programs result in a $3 to $6 return for each dollar invested by the employer. Savings are typically realized about two to five years after initial investment.

Health Disparities Can Be Tackled in the Workplace

- Promoting workplace health can help those who are at greater risk for developing many chronic diseases. Improving coverage and access to effective preventive services at work may help some groups of working Americans—low-income people, people living in rural communities, older workers, African-Americans, Hispanics and others—catch and treat chronic disease in their earliest stages.

What Can State Legislators Do?

- **Share your personal workplace health activities with the media and constituents.** Eat healthful meals, exercise at work, quit smoking and get recommended health screenings—and let others know what you are doing.

- **Work with health care insurers to extend coverage for preventive services.** Consider requiring insurers to develop health care plans that include preventive services, such as cancer and blood pressure screenings, nutrition counseling and tobacco cessation programs.
Create incentives for healthy behaviors in your state’s Medicaid program. Consider expanded incentives for Medicaid participants with risk factors for chronic diseases to enroll in programs that promote healthy behaviors.

Create or expand a state employee workplace health program. If your state government doesn’t offer an employee workplace health program, consider proposing one. If your state has such a program, investigate whether it might be expanded or improved and serve as a model for state and local businesses.

Partner with business groups promoting workplace health. Work with local business coalitions, especially involving small businesses, to encourage implementation of workplace health programs. Consider creating a state program or hosting a state-sponsored conference that helps employers determine cost-effective preventive services to buy for their employees.

Consider offering tax credits to employers to establish workplace health programs. For example, Indiana (2007 House Bill 1678) provides for a tax credit for small businesses that offer a qualified wellness program for employees.

Recognize employer efforts. Work with the state health department to develop an awards program to recognize employers who offer exemplary or innovative workplace health programs.

What Is Workplace Health?

Workplace health refers to efforts by employers to improve employee health, decrease health care costs, reduce absenteeism and increase productivity.

Simply providing health information to employees is usually not enough to motivate the lifestyle changes that are needed to significantly improve health. A comprehensive approach to workplace health is more effective and key elements include:

- **Health promotion programs** such as health risk assessments and screenings, risk factor education and counseling, and health education classes or workshops;
- **Health-related policies** such as making healthful foods and drinks available, implementing policies that allow employees to use work time for health promotion activities, and establishing tobacco-free policies;
- **Health benefits** including incentives for employee participation in prevention efforts;
- **Environmental supports** such as creating accessible places to exercise; and
- **Assessment, implementation and evaluation components** that assess current workplace activities, establish program goals and activities based on evidence-based criteria, build capacity to administer and manage health promotion activities and evaluate program results.

For more information, see the Healthy States Legislator Policy Brief “Promoting Workplace Health,” available at [http://www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications/](http://www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications/).

If you would like more information or references:

- Send your inquiry to [http://www.healthystates.csg.org/](http://www.healthystates.csg.org/) (keyword: questions/comments) or
- Call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244-8000.

This Healthy States publication is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under Cooperative Agreement U38/CCU424348. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. government.