



CASE STUDY

The Challenge

In the mid-1990's, the State of Oklahoma statutorily created the State Wellness Program, a program of the Employees Benefits Council (EBC) and a health and wellness program for all 37,000 state employees. The EBC recognized a need to implement a sustainable program for all employees due to the rising cost of health care, the increased cost to fund health benefits for state employees and their families, and the overall poor health status of state employees. More than 30 percent of state employees had been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease and/or diabetes and another 30 percent were at risk for developing these conditions. As a result, Nancy Haller was hired to develop and implement the state-wide employee health and wellness program.

For a decade, Haller and others traveled throughout Oklahoma screening state employees and providing self-care guides to program participants. It was then that Haller realized the program's success required a new, automated screening process to avoid possible misreporting or loss of data. With state employees moving from agency to agency and choosing from a variety of health plans, a better, more efficient manner for tracking these employees' health and behavior changes also had to be developed.

The Solution

2002: The EBC and partner, INTERVENT^{USA}, Inc., of Savannah, GA, (which was acquired by Nationwide Better HealthSM in 2007) developed and implemented a 12-month, scientifically proven, web-based program that included an online health history questionnaire, a risk stratification of participants, goals and action plans, an extensive tracking component, one-on-one telephone health mentoring (coaching) and educational kits on exercise, nutrition, stress management, diabetes management and smoking cessation.

2003: Haller piloted her newly modeled program to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Six months into the pilot, response was so great that Haller had to add three health educators to mentor more than 1,500 participants.

2006: Haller and her team rolled out the more comprehensive program, known as the “OK Health Mentoring Program,” to all 37,000 state employees. To make the program even more attractive, they began to offer cash incentives – a perk new to government agencies as a result of recently passed legislation. With the assistance of Administrator and Cabinet Secretary for Human Resources and Administration Oscar B. Jackson, Jr., and his staff, Haller and her team crafted rules around three types of incentives: participants can have one initial visit with their primary care provider and two labs (specific to the program) free of charge, receive a cash incentive paid by participating state agencies (gold \$500, silver \$300 and bronze \$100) and receive discounts to fitness facilities throughout Oklahoma.

2006-present: Since the OK Health Mentoring Program's inception, the response from state employees has been overwhelming. In addition to the program's features and benefits, Haller attributes the success – and the success of her mentors – to her Nationwide Better Health team, led by Dr. Neil Gordon, chief medical and science officer; Dr. Richard Salmon, director of IT applications; Billy Saxon, IT applications consultant; and Chip Faircloth, senior market planning consultant.

This team also included the EBC's new executive director, Philip K. Kraft, whose determination and resolve was key to making the program thrive. Kraft insisted on creating a “Healthy Vision Committee” article, dated 2013, that outlined how state employees in Oklahoma would become the healthiest in the nation. He cautioned state employees that the effort would be hard, but reminded them of President John F. Kennedy's 1962 vision for sending American astronauts to the moon: “We choose to go...not because it is easy, but because it is hard, because that goal will serve to measure and organize the best of our energies and skills.”

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The Solution *(continued)*

As a result of this success, the staff was expanded to include ten health mentors, an administrative assistant and an epidemiologist who analyzes medical and pharmacy claims data. Haller continues to work closely with Nationwide Better HealthSM on biomedical analysis, streamlining the employee enrollment process and for technical assistance. She also oversees the State Wellness Program, which is made up of 124 agency wellness coordinators representing the 37,000 employees in Oklahoma. The State Wellness Program meets on a quarterly basis and is now in its 14th year. Information on the State Wellness Program and OK Health Mentoring Program can be found at www.ebc.state.ok.us.

The Successes

Although current program results are still in the early stage, more than 7,000 state employees have made inquiries about the program and more than 3,500 employees completed at least one year in the program. Those participants with actionable health outcomes have, on average:

- > decreased total cholesterol by 25 mg/dl
- > decreased LDL by 25 mg/dl
- > increased HDL by 5 mg/dl
- > decreased blood sugar by 10 mg/dl
- > decreased triglycerides by 53 mg/dl
- > lost more than nine lbs.

More recently, Haller has noticed a couple positive trends among program participants, including a 21 percent drop in medical claims use and an increase in pharmacy claims submitted. These “wins” are primarily due to more participants taking their prescribed medications as directed and taking accountability for their health while working with their personal mentor. The evaluation process also indicates that participants who have been enrolled in the program for at least one year feel better about themselves, are more productive during the day and are more motivated to remain in the program. Also, through better tracking, Haller has seen doctor visits, hospitalizations and emergency room encounters decrease by 34 percent, 9 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

Special Awards and Recognition

- > In May 2007, the OK Health Mentoring Program was awarded “Best of Class” by the Southwest Benefits Association.
- > In 2008, the virtues of the OK Health Mentoring Program were shared in presentations to groups both within Oklahoma and other states.
- > In December 2008, program officials were invited to present to a closed session of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Commission to “Build a Healthier America.” Commissioners invited representatives from a select group of states with robust and well-developed activities to speak about ways they are promoting and enhancing wellness.

The Future

It’s the EBC’s goal to have the healthiest state employees in the nation. “This is a challenge we are willing to accept and one that cannot be postponed,” Kraft stated. Haller concludes that one way to reach this goal is to expand the OK Health Mentoring Program to include spouses and dependents who are at least 18 years old.

More About Nationwide Better Health:

Nationwide Better Health, a subsidiary of Nationwide, is a leading provider of health and productivity management solutions, aimed at improving the health and productivity of America’s workforce. Nationwide Better Health is the first company to truly integrate the best collection of health and productivity services available

today, including health and wellness, and disease, disability, absence, medical and maternity management. For more information, call 866.404.6924 or visit: www.nwbetterhealth.com.