

Advancing Healthy Lifestyles

Focus on Workplace Wellness

Background

Advancing Healthy Lifestyles: Chronic Disease, Health Equity, & COVID-19 (“Advancing Healthy Lifestyles” or “AHL”) is a statewide initiative launched in January 2021 by the Delaware Division of Public Health’s Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention Program (PANO). PANO introduced the AHL initiative as COVID-19 exacerbated the health burdens already faced by many Delawareans. The goal of AHL is to reduce obesity and other chronic conditions to achieve health equity among all Delaware residents. Figure 1 shows AHL’s goal and the three components of its strategy. This brief, the fourth and final in a [series](#), focuses on workplace wellness for Executive Branch agency employees in the State of Delaware.

In 2017, Governor John Carney released the [Action Plan for Delaware](#), which recommended ways to help the State of Delaware achieve its goals related to its economy, workforce, education system, and health care system. One of the action plan’s objectives was to “improve health outcomes and reduce health costs for all Delawareans,” and a suggested action item for this objective was to “investigate ways to incentivize better health and wellness among State employees.” In response to a request by the governor, the Cancer Risk Reduction Committee of the [Delaware Cancer Consortium](#) formed the [Healthy Lifestyles Subcommittee \(HLSC\)](#) to develop a strategy for implementing priority initiatives identified in the action plan.

In early 2021, the HLSC released a [final report](#) with policy recommendations based on the action plan, including a recommendation to create a formal workplace wellness program infrastructure for State employers as well as a recommendation to strengthen breastfeeding supports, including anti-discrimination protections, in the workplace and other settings. This infrastructure would help increase the offering of wellness activities and participation in these activities among State employees and encourage employers in the private and non-profit sectors to develop their own workplace wellness program infrastructures.

In this brief, we describe how a partnership between two Delaware Executive Branch agencies—the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health (DPH) and the Department of Human Resources (DHR), Statewide Benefits Office (SBO)—made this vision a reality by working together to establish an innovative policy that supports workplace wellness initiatives for Executive Branch agency employees.

The development of the State of Delaware’s workplace wellness policy involved:

- ✦ **Collaboration** between Executive Branch agencies
- ✦ **Input from key partners** throughout the State and subject matter experts in workplace wellness
- ✦ **Implementation of an innovative public health practice** for improving workplace conditions and employee health



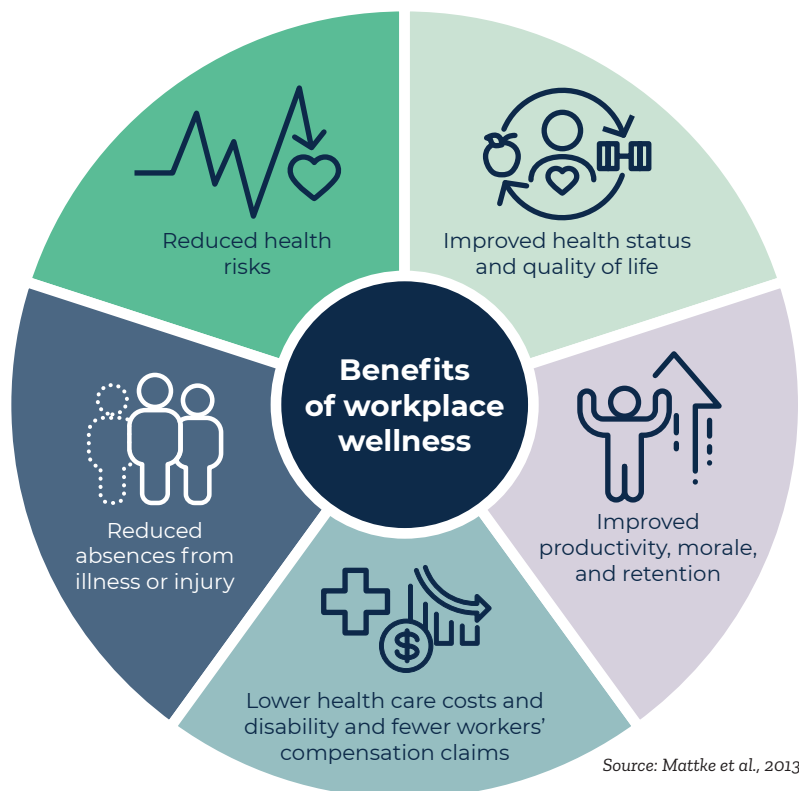
Figure 1. Promoting workplace wellness is one of three strategic components to achieve AHL’s goal.



Background on Workplace Wellness

As the policy recommendation suggests, the workplace is an important setting for promoting health and wellness because workers typically spend a third of their day in the workplace, five days a week. Employers can support employees’ health and wellness through workplace wellness initiatives that use programs, policies, benefits, environmental supports, and links to the surrounding community that are designed to meet the health and safety needs of all employees.¹ A convincing body of evidence shows that workplace wellness activities contribute to improved health and well-being among employees (Figure 2).² Successful workplace wellness initiatives view employees’ health and wellness holistically and treat wellness as a core factor of business operations.

Figure 2. Benefits of workplace wellness initiatives for employers and employees





Efforts to Support Workplace Wellness in the State of Delaware

In 2020, SBO drafted a workplace wellness policy for Executive Branch agencies and shared it with the HLSC. Promoting employee health and well-being is a component of the mission statement of the State Employee Benefits Committee’s [Group Health Insurance Plan Strategic Framework](#), and SBO functions as the “administrative arm” of the State Employee Benefits Committee. The HLSC’s recommendation to create a formal workplace wellness infrastructure for State employers was intended to build upon the existing workplace wellness policy draft by working with key partners—such as HLSC members, organization Human Resources leads, and DPH—to continue the development and implementation of the policy.

The HLSC recommended that State agencies first adopt the policy and expand it by working with school districts, charter schools, and higher education (such as Delaware Technical Community College and Delaware State University). Under the AHL initiative, SBO and PANO formed a partnership to bring this recommendation to life.

PANO, SBO, and DPH-contracted vendor Mathematica formed a workgroup that contributed to the development of this policy. The workgroup included representatives (Human Resource leads or their designees) from Executive Branch agencies across the State and the Office of the Governor who provided their input on the policy’s development and implementation plans. Because health equity is a core focus of the AHL initiative overall and of this policy, it was important for the workgroup to



The goals of the policy recommendation were to:



1. Create a workplace wellness policy for the State workforce that included language on equity to protect workers from inequitable impact and that reflected the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Workplace Health Model
2. Memorialize Delaware’s recent healthy vending policies and healthier food and snack guidelines, and
3. Address behavioral health.

represent Delaware’s diverse State employee population and to ensure that the final policy addressed the unique needs across Delaware’s Executive Branch agencies. The workgroup met and communicated regularly over a year to discuss workplace wellness priorities for the State, the content of a draft workplace wellness policy, and implementation of these initiatives within diverse agencies.

The AHL team (SBO, PANO, and Mathematica) and the workgroup were informed by extensive research evidence on workplace wellness, including the review of existing workplace wellness policies from several states with formal initiatives, and the contributions of subject matter experts, including program directors from some of these states. The workgroup also met with the CDC’s Team Lead of Workplace



Health Programs, who offered lessons learned from other states that implemented workplace wellness policies and provided in-depth feedback on Delaware’s existing policy draft.

The AHL team revised the policy draft to incorporate feedback based on multiple rounds of review by workgroup members and subject matter experts. The policy draft received additional review by the DHR Policy and Procedures Workgroup, DHR Division of Personnel (Talent Management), DHR Insurance Coverage Office, DHR Director of Communications, DHR Deputy Attorney General, and DHR Cabinet Secretary. The final product, the [DHR Workplace Wellness Policy and Procedures](#), is a comprehensive policy that provides guidance on the foundation and infrastructure for Executive Branch agencies to establish and maintain workplace wellness initiatives. The policy addresses topics related to organizing and planning a workplace wellness initiative as well as activities, services, and other resources to address several health and wellness subjects (Figure 3).

As part of the policy development efforts, the AHL team also created a standardized [Liability Waiver for Participation in Workplace Fitness Activities](#), [Media Release Form](#), and a comprehensive [Workplace Wellness Toolkit](#). In support of the policy recommendation from the HLSC around strengthening breastfeeding

Figure 3. Topics addressed by the DHR Workplace Wellness Policy and Procedures



Organization and Planning

- ✓ Agency Wellness Leaders and Committees
- ✓ DHR Wellness Coordinator and Cross-Agency Committee
- ✓ Designing an Employee Workplace Wellness Infrastructure
- ✓ Quality Monitoring and Evaluation
- ✓ Equity and Accessibility
- ✓ Employee Use of Time
- ✓ Data Reporting



Health and Wellness

- ✓ Physical Activity
- ✓ Healthy Eating
- ✓ Mental Health and Wellness
- ✓ Financial Wellness
- ✓ Occupational Health and Safety

supports in the workplace, the [Pregnant Workers Fairness Act Policy and Procedures](#) are referenced in the workplace wellness policy, and a section on lactation support was included in the toolkit.

The toolkit is intended to help Executive Branch agencies implement the workplace wellness policy and offers best practices for employers, tips, tools, and shareable resources with links to additional information related to workplace wellness. In addition to guidance on the topics addressed by the workplace wellness policy, the toolkit addresses promoting employee benefits, National Health Observances, weight management, alcohol and substance abuse, tobacco use cessation, and chronic condition prevention and management. The toolkit is intended to be a living resource for Executive Branch agencies that is updated over time.



Conclusion

The DHR Workplace Wellness Policy and Procedures and the Workplace Wellness Toolkit were released to Executive Branch agencies and departments in June 2022. The development of the policy and toolkit were built on best practices and expertise, involving considerable consultation with key internal and external partners, including representatives from Executive Branch agencies and leading subject matter experts in the field of workplace wellness.

This collaborative effort between SBO and PANO resulted in a comprehensive, evidence-based workplace wellness policy to support Executive Branch agency employees in improving their physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being, with accompanying tools to assist with policy implementation. The use of a formal workplace wellness policy for state governments is still a relatively novel approach. Delaware is setting an example for its private employers and for other states seeking to implement a workplace wellness policy.



This brief was prepared on behalf of the Delaware Division of Public Health by Mathematica, the contractor supporting the community and workplace components of the Advancing Healthy Lifestyles initiative.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016, May). Workplace health model. <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/model/index.html>

² Mattke, S., Liu, H., Caloyeras, J., Huang, C. Y., Van Busum, K. R., Khodyakov, D., & Shier, V. (2013). *Workplace wellness programs study: final report*. Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR254.html

