



## Investing in Worksite Wellness for Dow Employees



**“What made The Community Guide useful was that it was a central source of information...to have this central repository where the analysis was already done was such a boon to us.”**

Catherine M. Basse, MD, FAAFP,  
FACOEM  
Global Director of Health Services  
The Dow Chemical Company

### More Information

**Dow Family Health**  
[www.dow.com/familyhealth](http://www.dow.com/familyhealth)

**The Community Guide:  
CPSTF Recommendations on  
Worksite Health Promotion**  
[www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/worksite](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/worksite)

**CDC Healthier Worksite Initiative**  
[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi)

**G**ood Health for the Whole Self is the theme for the Dow Chemical Company's (Dow) health promotion program, which is part of its integrated health strategy to improve the health of Dow's most important asset—its 52,000 employees.<sup>1</sup> Dow has offered occupational health services for nearly 100 years, and formal health promotion programs have been in place for 25 years. To inform the design of these programs, Dow uses evidence-based findings and recommendations from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) found in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide). Dow has incorporated these findings and recommendations to achieve a global culture of health that addresses chronic disease risk factors such as obesity, physical activity, and tobacco use among its employees.

### Investing in a Healthy Workforce

Dow directly links the health of its employees to business goals. A four-pillar health strategy that includes prevention, quality and effectiveness, health system management, and advocacy creates an environment where employee health is a priority. This priority is seen in the many and diverse health initiatives supported by Dow, including preventive health benefits, on-site health programs, nutritious food options in cafeterias, and supportive fitness teams.

### Moving from Data to Action

Dr. Catherine Baase, global director of health services at Dow, provides leadership for the company's health strategy and is responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating programs in occupational health and health promotion. The Community Guide has been a key resource for her since its inception in 1996, and she often uses it to build the business case for the company's worksite wellness initiatives. “We really felt this filled an important need for us.” Dr. Baase remembers, “We felt The Community Guide would make us more effective in running our health promotion efforts and our health strategy.” Dow has relied on a variety of evidence-based findings and recommendations from The Community Guide, which include these:

- Assessment of health risks with feedback (AHRF), plus health education with or without other interventions
- Creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities
- Worksite programs to control overweight and obesity
- Smoke-free policies to reduce tobacco use among workers

### Creating a Healthy Change From Within

Dow's success in establishing a culture of health is the result of their comprehensive approach that focuses strongly on prevention. For example, the company holds special events such as a Friday 5K, hosts exercise classes on demand, and encourages walking meetings. Dr. Baase says, “I tell my staff to just say, ‘let's walk while we're meeting.’ And if you're just brainstorming or talking through some project, it's easy to walk.”

To encourage healthy eating and help control overweight and obesity, serving utensils for food items at the cafeteria salad bar are color coded to distinguish between healthier options and less healthful choices. Green utensils prompt diners to “go” for



highly nutritious options such as broccoli, spinach, and beets. Yellow utensils signal “caution” toward foods to eat in moderation, while red utensils warn employees to “stop” before taking too much of high-fat foods, such as bacon. “It’s to make sure employees are educated and aware. At a glance, they’re able to make the healthy choice if they choose,” says Peggy Szczepanski, health promotion coordinator. To further motivate employees to make healthy food choices, Dow prices many of its healthier food offerings lower than high-fat, less healthful options.



## What is The Community Guide?

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel of public health and prevention experts—bases its recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the CPSTF, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.

[www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)



 Community  
Preventive Services  
Task Force

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Dow’s annual No Tobacco Day urges users to make a commitment to quit using tobacco for at least one day. The program aligns with the Task Force recommendations to combine worksite incentives and competitions with other tobacco cessation efforts to reduce tobacco use among workers. Participants in Dow’s program sign up online to receive motivational messages and a chance to win prizes. In its inaugural year, 6 percent of tobacco users committed to quit and 56 percent met the 24-hour challenge. At 6 months, 11 percent of surveyed participants remained tobacco free. Site leaders across the company also committed to making their work environment more supportive by sponsoring activities such as tobacco cessation workshops, free “cold turkey” lunches, and educational sessions for employees’ families.

## Dow’s Health Strategy Shows Promise

The majority of Dow employees are engaged in the company’s worksite wellness efforts. Eighty-five percent of Dow’s employees worldwide voluntarily participate in assessments of health risks, and 75 percent participate in one or more internal Dow health services each year. Between 2004 and 2008, employees considered high-risk (based on obesity, tobacco use, and physical activity indicators) reduced their risk by 15 percent, while low-risk employees reduced their risk by 18 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Dow’s commitment to employee health has garnered national recognition for its leadership, innovation, and measurable outcomes in corporate health programs. Although these programs are strategic investments in the health of employees, the cost savings are undeniable. In Congressional testimony, Dr. Baase highlighted the bottom-line value these programs can have for the company. Between 2004 and 2010, Dow estimates that their health strategy saved more than \$100 million in U.S. healthcare costs. Dow has demonstrated that a comprehensive approach to employee health is not only possible, but can be highly successful.

## Lessons Learned

- **Employees value a company’s commitment to their health.** Dow conducts regular health assessments that provide feedback to employees, and uses this information to develop interventions customized to its employees’ needs. According to satisfaction surveys, 95 percent of Dow’s employees value this option and the company is able to attain high participation rates without using direct financial incentives.
- **Integrate programs, services, and policies to promote employee health.** As part of Dow’s approach to tobacco cessation, it strengthened its internal health counseling efforts, as well as improved its U.S. medical benefits plan, to fully cover tobacco cessation counseling and prescription medications. Dow used evidence-based findings from sources including The Community Guide to support these decisions.
- **Create a supportive environment.** Dow combined relatively inexpensive changes to its physical environment (such as walking paths, healthy food choices, and nutritional information on vending machines and in cafeterias) with more intensive-level behavioral change programs. The success of this approach suggested that combining environmental changes with individual-level programs can improve behavioral risk factors.

<sup>1</sup>Dow Family Health. [www.dow.com/familyhealth/](http://www.dow.com/familyhealth/). Accessed on March 22, 2012.

<sup>2</sup>Baase, CM. Principles of integrated health: A path to health care reform. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. February 23, 2009. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111shrg47760/pdf/CHRG-111shrg47760.pdf>. Accessed on March 28, 2012.