Chronic disease is one of the greatest threats to our nation’s health and productivity. Obesity and diabetes are serious chronic conditions that pose wide-reaching, expensive, and preventable health burdens affecting nearly 34 and 11 percent of U.S. adults, respectively.⁰ In 2010, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) identified obesity and diabetes as priority areas and launched an initiative to address these conditions by promoting wellness at worksites across the state. Maryland DHMH used findings and recommendations from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) in The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) as the basis to assess and influence change in employees’ health. A year later, more than 150 businesses committed to workplace wellness options for more than 180,000 employees.

**Obesity and Diabetes Prevention are a Priority**

Maryland DHMH recognized the negative impact of chronic disease and tried to find ways to reduce its effect. Through input from state and national health and human resource experts on the Maryland Health Quality and Cost Council (Council), the health department used a prioritization process called “B.I.G.” to identify specific health areas to target. The steps include:

1. Identify high-priority conditions based on clinical, social, and economic burden, with attention to health equity
2. Identify potential for improvability (e.g., preventable burden of disease; gaps in prevention and care compared to evidence-based standards; relatively low current resource allocation)
3. Apply a “gut check” to determine if the priority makes sense given political will and available partnerships

Using this process, the Council chose to focus on obesity and diabetes as issues with a “big” impact on Maryland residents.

**Worksite Wellness is Evidence-Based**

“When we were looking for different strategies [to address obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases prevalent in Maryland], we started with evidence-based resources,” says Dr. Maria Prince, chronic disease medical director at DHMH. Council members identified worksite wellness as a key strategy to reach the more than 3 million workers within the state. The Council and its chair, Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, initiated a program called Healthiest Maryland, a movement to create a culture of wellness where the healthiest choice is easy. The first phase of the program, Healthiest Maryland Businesses, focused on worksite-based promotion of healthy lifestyles among employees. Dr. Prince went directly to The Community Guide and made use of a variety of the CPSTF’s worksite health and diabetes recommendations, including:

- Assessment of health risks with feedback (AHRF) plus health education with or without other interventions
- Diabetes disease management programs
- Point-of-decision prompts to encourage use of stairs
- Worksite programs to control overweight and obesity

More Information

**Healthiest Maryland**
www.health.maryland.gov/healthiest

**Maryland’s Health Quality and Cost Council**
www.health.maryland.gov/mhqcc/

**The Community Guide: CPSTF Findings on Worksite Health Promotion**
www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/worksite-health

**Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, CDC**
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao

“We appreciate how The Community Guide and Task Force do the legwork of reviewing the literature and finding which strategies are evidence-based.”

Maria Prince, MD, MPH
Chronic Disease Medical Director Office of Chronic Disease Prevention, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Lessons Learned

- **Use the most up-to-date evidence to inform program decisions.** Dr. Prince regularly visited The Community Guide website for the latest Task Force findings and recommendations, and as a result was able to apply worksite wellness interventions shortly after they were made available.

- **Focus on key decision makers.** The Council appealed directly to executives in various industries and companies to improve commitment to the initiative at all levels of the participating organizations.

- **Gain the the support of leadership by citing credible resources.** The Council referenced trustworthy sources, including The Community Guide, to convince the Lt. Governor to move forward with Healthiest Maryland. In addition, data showing the potential to improve the employer’s bottom-line increased program buy-in.

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