



DSHS EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PILOT PROGRAM

DSHS is implementing the “Building Healthy Texans” employee wellness program to increase the health of all DSHS employees and benchmark a model for other Texas agencies and public sector organizations. The program will consist of four segments intended to help employees to:

- Increase their knowledge of their personal health status;
- Consume more nutritious food;
- Increase their physical fitness; and,
- Manage their stress effectively.

These goals are built on a fundamental public health premise: that it is always less expensive and more effective to prevent disease than treat it. Through this pilot, DSHS hopes to show state agencies and other public sector entities how to create scalable, feasible, cost-effective, and well-received wellness programs. The project has been built on a foundation of considerable employee input, including a series of focus groups, and it incorporates ongoing feedback mechanisms to identify opportunities for “fine-tuning” and continuous improvement.

Personal Health Awareness

The goal of the health assessment phase is to improve employees’ knowledge of their own health status by ensuring that they have discussed their health issues with their physician within the last 12 months. To support this, DSHS is:

- Providing employees up to four hours of paid leave to visit their physician for appropriate screenings, examinations, tests, immunizations, referrals, and follow up visits; and,
- Granting employees eight additional hours of paid leave to motivate employees to have their annual exams.

All DSHS employees (almost 12,000 in all, including hospitals and regions) are eligible to participate and they have been actively encouraged to do so through a comprehensive communication plan and Intranet website.

Nutrition

One month after the personal health awareness phase rolled out, DSHS began assisting employees in making healthier nutritional choices at the worksite by offering lower fat choices. Healthier nutrition will be made available within the workplace. Building on earlier initiatives, the nutritional segment will include:

- Healthier food offerings in places such as the onsite cafeteria and vending machines;
- Communication through posters and the Intranet web-site about the nutritional content of the food offered in the cafeteria setting or vending machines; and,
- Color-coded labels to identify foods that can be eaten almost anytime (Go), sometimes (Slow), and once in while (Whoa). This identification process assists in the selection process for choosing foods that are lowest in fat.

Physical Fitness

Employees will be encouraged to engage in a more active lifestyle. In this phase of the project, which is scheduled for rollout in early 2006, employees will be given opportunities and incentives to be more physically active. Possibilities include:

- Incentives for employee participation in individual and team athletic activities;
- Modifications to work schedules to enable employees to exercise;
- Development of an employee athletic association;
- Improvements to onsite fitness facilities;
- Discounts for health club memberships, and sporting goods retail stores; and,
- On-site mentoring and coaching programs.

Stress Management

Inability to manage stress can have significant deleterious effects upon a person's health. In the final stage of the pilot, DSHS will provide:

- Access to information, activities and services to assist employees in making life style changes to manage stress levels; and,
- Incentives to encourage employees to take advantage of these activities and services.

Planning for the "Stress Management" segment will include a review of the DSHS workplace improvement report and discussions with the Department Employee Advisory Council to identify any areas that the Building Healthy Texans might appropriately address.

Implementation of this segment will occur during the middle part of 2006.