It all starts with a solid health and wellness foundation

Are you making the grade when it comes to good health at your institution of higher learning? We’ve put together this guide to help you do just that. With the rise in popularity of workplace wellness programs, many professionals are making healthy lifestyle changes. Now you can put together a wellness program for your college or university to help your employees get and stay healthy.

Did you know that up to 70% of health care costs are the result of personal lifestyle choices? The good news is this – they’re avoidable, which means you can lead your team to organize and implement a successful wellness program. At Cigna, we have decades of experience providing benefit solutions to public and private institutions of higher education. Let us share this guide with you. Inside, you’ll find the information you need to help establish a campus-wide wellness program for your faculty and staff.

Wellness programs have transformed many workplaces. They can help your faculty and staff make the grade, too.
Why wellness matters

Several studies prove that chronic illness and disease can be easily managed and treated. When you consider the important role higher education plays in modern life, keeping those who interact with students in good health truly matters; not just for the institution, but for the future of our country. Stress, heart disease, many mental disorders and other chronic illnesses can be greatly reduced by making healthy lifestyle changes.

Getting started is easy

Follow this simple, four-part formula to lay the foundation for your wellness program.

1. **Determine** the agreed-upon core beliefs of your institution
   - Learn about the issues that most concern your board of trustees and provost

2. **Enlist** the support of key departments and committees
   - Talk to key people about the initiative and set expectations

3. **Establish** a wellness committee with the right people
   - Recruit representatives
   - Choose committee members with a variety of skills and leaders who can implement the committee’s vision
   - Be sure to include any staff with expertise on nutrition, health and wellness

4. **Conduct** an assessment to understand current health and wellness levels and to put together a plan
   - Assess current activities. This can be done by human resources

The syllabus for success

It’s important to develop a road map you and your staff can easily follow. Use these steps to plan your program.

- **Data Collection**
  - Cultural Assessment
  - Health Assessment
  - Medical Claim Review
  - Employee Interest Survey
  - Biometric Screenings

- **Build Infrastructure**
  - Budget
  - Health Steering Committee
  - Health Improvement Committee
  - Health Improvement Champions

- **Develop Operating Plan**
  - Mission Statement and Brand
  - Key Goals and Objectives
  - Annual Calendar of Events
  - Communications, Incentives
  - Measure and Evaluation
• Choose appropriate activities, including:
  - Education/awareness programs
  - Health screenings
  - Lifestyle change programs
  - Disease and stress management
  - Physical activity or nutrition challenges between departments
• Use your campus resources. Nutrition, culinary and athletic programs already in place can be great assets
• Consider your school environment. Use campus events as opportunities for wellness. Remember school schedules when planning
• Develop a message
  - Keep your message simple. Make it relevant to staff and professors or customize it for each
  - Create a brand look and feel for your initiative. Use the colors and logos of your school to get people excited
  - Keep messages consistent and send the same ones repeatedly
• Keep campus culture in mind
  - Use electronic communications, intranet articles, emails and flyers
• Be aware of pitfalls
  - Remember to keep all data confidential
  - Be prepared for questions. “Will my health coverage or rates change?” is a common one

**The importance of attendance**

When it comes to ensuring the success of your wellness program, participation is key. Keep it simple; start with two to three programs. Be sure to communicate goals and events throughout the year. Use these tips to help you succeed.

• Get active, public support from department heads
  - Communicate wellness success stories
  - Have department heads send communications and announce the initiative during meetings
• Make participating easy
  - Onsite clinics encourage preventive visits
  - Hold events at appropriate schools, i.e. Nursing, and try to schedule them during times that work well for everyone
  - Use large group events to promote the program
• Incentives, incentives, incentives
  - Premium differential
  - Cash or gift cards
  - Deposits into HSA/HRA

**Sign off for true success**

Your program can’t succeed unless everyone involved is dedicated to that success. Make sure key players, those at the Health Center, Public Safety, Provost and Faculty Senate offices, are completely on board. And speaking of “on board,” don’t forget to get the Board of Directors to sign on to the plan, too.
Wellness. It needs to be part of campus culture

In the same way that education requires more than just one class, this requires more than just one effort. Take the steps to put wellness front and center, making it a way of life on campus. When you do, you’ll find the pay-off will be better health.

• Have administration proclaim health to be important and agree to be accountable
• Serve healthy choices. Replace unhealthy vending machine snacks with healthy ones
• Create a smoke-free campus
• Put policies in place to limit stress and increase job satisfaction
• Provide exercise breaks
• Communicate these goals to all new faculty and staff

How to know if you’ve “made the grade”

A successful program adjusts to the changing needs of its participants. Take the time to look at what worked and what didn’t. Determine better ways to use resources, reach more people and measure the program’s impact and effectiveness. And always be open to tapping other people’s expertise as you work to create a culture of well-being. New ideas are always welcome if it means greater participation.

Please contact your broker/consultant for additional assistance in supporting your wellness program initiatives. And, for information on employee health benefit plans for Higher Education, contact:

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2. We wish to acknowledge that the steps for establishing a wellness program are adapted from material by the Wellness Councils of America (Welcoa) at www.welcoa.com and the book Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Health Promotion Programs by J.F. McKenzie, B.L. Neiger, and J.L. Smeltzer. 2005.