

Background

Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project (HONU) is a 10-year initiative to reduce heart attacks in New Ulm, Minnesota. The project was initiated in 2009 with community and worksite screenings.

HONU delivers interventions in health care, community and worksite settings.

The Worksite Wellness Program (WWP) initiative aims to engage the largest 100 employers in New Ulm to impact employee health and productivity. The majority of these employers have fewer than 200 employees; almost all are fully insured (vs. self-insured).

Emphasis is not only on the cost savings of health care, but also on productivity indicators and morale. Worksite engagement may include worksite assessments, health screenings, health and wellness programs and services, events and environmental changes.

Methods

Worksite engagement recruitment and screenings

Worksites are recruited for interventions through e-blasts, direct personal contact between project worksite leader and worksite wellness leaders, and the local Chamber of Commerce.

Dedicated “Employer Resources” section on the main HONU website offers employers a menu of all programs and services that HONU offers at no charge. Employer section also includes articles, recipes, presentation handouts, tools and other online resources. HONU staff sends quarterly e-mails highlighting employer successes (e.g., outcomes of employee wellness programs) and promoting programs or tools (e.g., tools to implement environmental changes at the worksite, such as a vending policy). Password access for certain areas allows tracking of individual employer access.

During a designated period, free screenings held onsite at employer’s worksite and open to employees and spouses (where applicable). Upon completion, each worksite receives comprehensive, aggregate screening data that pinpoints the top areas for health improvement among employees. Data can be used to help guide health promotion efforts, enabling the employer to focus on the specific lifestyle behaviors that will result in the biggest benefits for employees as well as the overall organization.

Table 1. Organizational characteristics of the 100 largest worksites in the New Ulm, Minn., community in 2009-2010.

| Worksite characteristics | (N = 100) |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Industry | |
| Services | 13% |
| Manufacturing | 15% |
| Communication | 4% |
| Retail | 11% |
| Transportation | 2% |
| Construction | 4% |
| Mining | 2% |
| Education | 2% |
| Other | 47% |
| Workforce size | |
| 501-1000 employees | 2% |
| 100-500 employees | 20% |
| 50-99 employees | 26% |
| 20-49 employees | 52% |

All values are reported as % of total.

Table 2. Participation in Heart of New Ulm Project worksite wellness activities across the 100 largest worksites in the New Ulm, Minn., community in 2009-2010.

| Heart of New Ulm Project worksite wellness activities | (N = 100) |
|---|-----------|
| Employee screening | 29% |
| Employee lifestyle challenge program | 28% |
| Employee wellness presentation | 13% |
| Organizational environment/policy/culture assessment | 46% |
| Employer leadership education events | 18% |
| Employer wellness newsletter subscription | 100% |

All values are reported as % of total.

Table 3. Select organizational wellness characteristics (baseline data) across the 46 worksites in New Ulm, Minn., that completed an organizational audit in 2010.

| Worksite wellness characteristics (n = 46) | |
|--|-----|
| Comprehensive tobacco ban | 35% |
| Established wellness committee | 50% |
| Offered health promotion program(s) to employees | 61% |
| Health incentive offered | 61% |
| Offers or promotes fitness facilities | 89% |
| Healthy options in vending or cafeteria | 52% |
| Self Insured | 37% |

All values are reported as % of total.

Results

Year one (2009) consisted primarily of screening and consultation by HONU staff. Year two (2010) focused on interventions. Now in year three, HONU’s focus is once again on screening and assessment to determine movement from baseline data collected in 2009. The following results were collected on each intervention offered.

Screenings

A total of 29 worksites were recruited to participate in free heart health screenings in 2009. Participation was defined as ≥1 onsite screening offered to employees. A total of 2,550 participants attended these worksite screenings. As a result of the screening, 10 worksites requested and received consultation from HONU staff on how to develop and implement a worksite health promotion program. Two worksites requested assistance with building a health promotion program into their benefits structure.

Lifestyle challenge programs

A total of 28 worksites participated in at least one behavior change program. A total of 1,862 program registrations were collected among these worksites.

Employee health and wellness presentations

A total of 13 employers held one or more health presentations in their worksite.

Organizational environmental/policy/culture assessment

A total of 48 worksites completed the WELCOA workplace audit.

Employer leadership education events

A total of 18 worksites attended one or both of the annual summits conducted to date.

Employer wellness newsletter subscription

A total of 130 worksites (including local restaurants) opted to receive the WELCOA *Partners in Health Newsletter* for their employees.

Conclusions

In 2009, HONU started working with worksites by offering health screenings, behavior change programs, health presentations and employer leadership education events. HONU has also helped worksites develop wellness committees and understand the impact that WWP can have on employee health and productivity.

HONU is growing wellness by implementing WWP into an entire community. Prior to HONU’s initiatives, only five of the largest 100 employers in the area offered had active wellness programming. In year three of the project there are now 45 employers who offer some form of wellness programming ranging from a formal committee to participation in lifestyle challenge program. Given that most research on wellness program effectiveness occurs among larger worksites, HONU provides a unique opportunity to document the impact of wellness on smaller worksites.

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