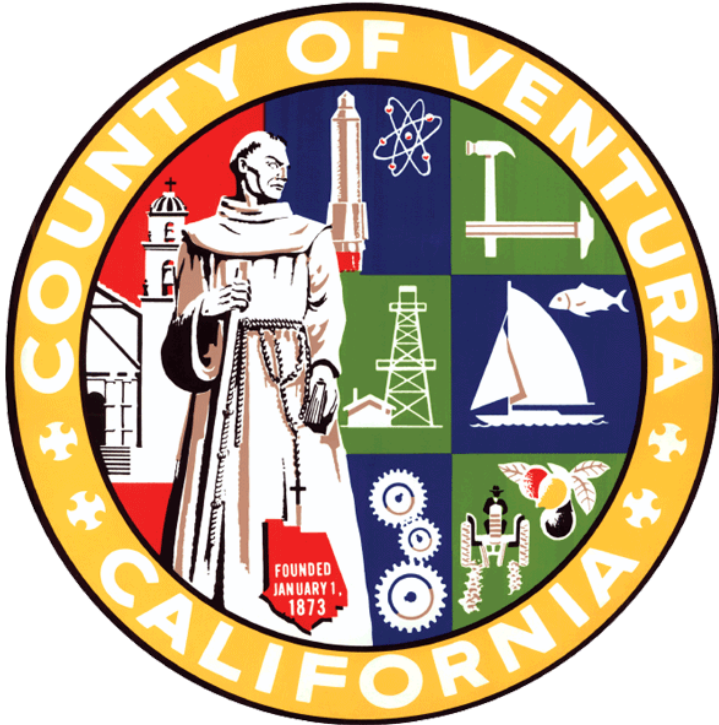


COUNTY OF VENTURA

WELLNESS PROGRAM

Annual Report
2019



Promoting Good Health and Helping Manage Health Care Costs

County Executive Office . Human Resources Division

I. Program Background

In 1983, the County of Ventura experienced a 71% increase in medical claims. In response, the Board of Supervisors approved a Labor Management Committee recommendation to establish the County's Wellness Program as part of the solution to help contain escalating health care costs. Since initiated in 1985, the Wellness Program has won numerous awards and has continued to develop and offer programs to help employees improve their health.

II. Program Design/Health Management Strategies

The goals of the County's Wellness Program (VC-WELL) are to promote health and well-being of County employees, and help mitigate increases in health care costs. The primary objectives are to:

1. Provide education and resources to help employees identify and reduce health risks before serious health problems occur.
2. Provide follow-up and assistance to employees identified with health risks linked to preventable illnesses and excessive medical costs.
3. *Increase participation and engagement in VC-WELL programs. (NEW)*
4. *Improve accessibility to VC-WELL programs and resources. (NEW)*
5. When health problems do exist, refer employees to programs and resources to better manage their condition/s.

Health Risk Assessment/Biometric Screening

Research has demonstrated that a health risk assessment (HRA) which includes follow-up is a key component of an effective wellness program. VC-WELL's Personal Wellness Profile (PWP) provides participants with a comprehensive HRA. To make the HRA more meaningful, participants can have their biometric results included from their physician or a County sponsored onsite biometric screening which measures blood pressure, BMI, waist girth, total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, triglycerides and glucose. In 2018, VC-WELL improved the screening process by changing the blood collection process to a finger stick from a venipuncture (needle in arm). This allows participants to receive their biometric results immediately instead of waiting more than a week. This also allows participants to meet with a Health Educator to review their results and ask questions immediately after the screening. All participants discovered with high-risk conditions receive prompt personal follow-up and referrals as appropriate, and are invited to meet with the County's Health Coach to address their health issues and improve their health risks. All personal information remains completely confidential and is protected in compliance with HIPAA.

Health Coaching

Best-practice research also demonstrates the value of risk reduction coaching for high-risk employees within the context of a comprehensive program. VC-WELL offers Health Track, a health coaching intervention offered to employees with health risks. Wellness Profile participants identified with risk factors such as high blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol are invited to join Health Track. Participants are assigned a Health Coach who teaches, inspires and supports them with difficult lifestyle changes. Health Coaches are health professionals such as Registered Dietitians and Certified Diabetes Educators.

Health Education & Physical Activity Classes (NEW)

VC-WELL provides educational and physical activity classes to help employees make lifestyle changes to reduce their health risks and improve their quality of life. Topics focus on areas of nutrition, fitness, stress management, and healthy living. Classes are generally scheduled at noontime or by Department request. **Historically, participation in live classes have been relatively low, so in 2019 VC-WELL introduced virtual classes via Target Solutions. Going virtual significantly increased participation in all classes offered, and improved class access to all employees throughout the County.**

Physical Activity Challenges

In 2017, VC-WELL introduced WELLtrek, a web-based and mobile accessible platform that allows employees to track their steps & physical activities while participating in friendly individual and interdepartmental competitions. The flexibility of WELLtrek allows users to track activity using wearable trackers, an app, or activity converter. **In 2019, VC-WELL offered more challenges to engage our employees to be more active, including the first ever “Million Steps March,” and challenge between counties of other states.**

Healthy Work Environment, Tools, and Awareness Campaigns

VC-WELL also promotes an environment supportive of healthy lifestyles with events like the Health & Wealth Fair and Health & Fitness Week, as well as campaigns such as Rethink Your Drink. The VC-WELL website provides resources to encourage physical activity including walking maps and shower/locker facilities for County work locations, and a local health club discount listing. The website also provides tools for healthier eating, like tips for healthier foods at meetings, potlucks and special events. Wellness flyers by elevators remind employees to incorporate physical activity into their workday.

Recreation and Leisure Events (NEW)

In 2018, VC-WELL introduced recreation and leisure programming. For individuals who are not health conscious but enjoy sports/recreation/leisure activities, offering these activities can act as a “gateway” into more traditional health improvement activities, such as health coaching and activity challenges. VC-WELL currently offers two recreational tournaments a year at no cost to participants: softball and bowling. Participation in both tournaments continue to grow each year. **In 2019, VC-WELL introduced a weekend hiking series that took place on Saturdays over four months. As with recreational events, the hikes provided participants the opportunity to mingle with co-workers while getting physical activity and enjoying our County’s natural scenery.**

Cash Incentive (NEW)

Incentives are increasingly being utilized by employers to encourage greater participation in workplace wellness programs. The County’s 2011-2016 Strategic Plan workforce focus area included an objective to develop and fund a wellness incentive program. In 2016, VC-WELL implemented an incentive program whereby Regular County employees participating in the County’s Flexible Benefits Program were able to qualify for a Fitbit.

Although Fitbits were successful in increasing PWP participation during its first year, participation decreased the following year (2017). **Due to the decreasing appeal of Fitbits, VC-WELL changed its incentive format in 2019 to provide cash awards. Incentive research suggested cash or premium discounts had greater appeal to**

employees, so this led to the creation of our newest flagship program – “WELLthy Reward\$.” The premise is simple, the more VC-WELL programs employees participate in, the higher the cash award they can earn based on meeting three different points thresholds – Bronze, Silver or Gold. Each color was linked to a specific cash award amount. Cash awards were taxable and paid via payroll.

III. Program Participation

In 2019, 888 employees completed a biometric screening, and 874 employees completed the HRA, **both increases of 7.1% and 17% respectively**. A comprehensive 4-year participation analysis is attached as Exhibit B. 72 new clients joined the health coaching program, and a total of 291 health coaching sessions were delivered, an **increase of 26% in new clients and 23% total sessions** respectively. VC-WELL held 172 live classes attended by 2,706 participants for a total of 4,353 training hours. Although the total number of classes were reduced by 37% due to budgetary constraints, **VC-WELL increased the number of participants by 9%, and training hours by 36% through strong promotion and program enhancements**.

In the program’s first year, WELLthy Reward\$ was a resounding success, with VC-WELL awarding 717 cash awards. This was a **66% increase** in the number of incentives awarded compared to 2017 when Fitbits were offered. WELLthy Reward\$ had a positive effect on the onsite screening program resulting in a **9.4% increase** in the participants/screening average, and a **34% increase** in consults compared to 2018 – see attached Exhibit A.

Utilization of the WELLtrek Challenge platform continued to increase with each successive challenge in 2019, culminating in the Million Steps Challenge being the 1st challenge ever to eclipse **1,000 employees logging steps**, and having a **36% increase** in participants meeting the steps goal over the 2018 challenge with the highest percent meeting the steps goal.

IV. New Priorities and Innovations

Given the recent historically low participation rates in the program, and higher costs of traditional programming, VC-WELL has implemented “next & best” practices to maximize our financial resources to increase participation and improve each employee’s experience.

- *Virtual classes – **Increased participation by 364% in 2019 over 2018 classes.***

V. Risks Identified

VC-WELL has been successful in identifying and reducing risk factors associated with today’s leading causes of death and disease. Table 1 summarizes the risks identified among those who completed a PWP in 2019. Participants identified with results out of range were referred for appropriate medical follow-up. Some of those identified with health risks were previously unaware of their condition.

Table 1

Initial Status of Wellness Profile Participants 2019	
Percentage	Factors
53% (466)	Got less than recommended physical activity
6% (55)	Had elevated cholesterol
2% (17)	Smoked
73% (634)	Were overweight or obese
33% (287)	Had elevated blood pressure
19% (164)	Had diabetes/prediabetes
45% (394)	Had at least one high stress indicator present
68% (598)	Had a low fruit/vegetable intake

Table 2

Wellness Profile Participant FY 2019 Initial Risk Factor Combinations	
Number of Risk Factors	Percent of People
0 Risk Factors	22.3% (195)
1 Risk Factor	29.5% (258)
2 to 3 Risk Factors	34.9% (305)
4 to 5 Risk Factors	11.4% (99)
6 or more Risk Factors	1.8% (16)

VI. Participant Satisfaction

VC-WELL participants complete evaluation forms at the end of various programs. Participants consistently give high ratings for the various programs offered. Based on survey feedback from biometric screenings, recreation and outdoor activities, employees were very satisfied with programmatic changes, and with the new programs offered. Exhibit A shows the positive impact of changing to a personalized consult compared to a group seminar. Survey highlights:

Screenings:

- 99% were satisfied with their screening experience
- 97% agreed the results consultation was worth attending
- 95% said screening results consult will help them improve their health
- 28% indicated their first time doing the screening
- 69% agreed that a cash incentive motivated them to do the screening

Bowling Tournament:

- 98% of participants rated their overall experience as excellent or good

Softball Tournament:

- 96% of participants rated their overall experience as excellent or good

VII. Conclusion

The County invests heavily in its most important asset – its employees. VC-WELL is an important tool in helping the County meet its strategic plan with respect to meeting objectives linked to workforce health and the ability to serve the community through Strategic Goal 4 of Focus Area #2: *to champion and invest in workplace policies, programs and practices that promote the overall health and well-being of all County employees.*

Continuing to invest in workforce health is wise and prudent, so it is crucial that VC-WELL continues to receive the support and resources necessary to fulfill its mission. It is recommended that industry best practices, programs and policies are considered and implemented when available and appropriate. Some of these practices include:

- Wellness Leadership training and recognition (management support)
- Opportunity to participate in programs and classes (release time)
- Expand use of incentives to increase participation
- Continue transforming our environment & culture to one that permeates wellbeing

2019 Employee-Satisfaction Comments

Ventura County Employees are “*Working Energetically and Loving Life*”

“Wow! I’m so excited to be a \$1,000 winner. I found the program to be extremely valuable. It played a big part in getting me motivated and keeping me motivated to keep moving. I discovered that 7,000 steps per day was the sweet spot for me. It was doable and it helped me to feel more energized throughout my busy work days. I really believe that I won more than just money because my real goal was to develop a more active lifestyle. Thank you for the great challenges you provided throughout the year.”

“I felt that the staff really cared about HSA Employees. The screening team was gentle, professional and really made me feel important. Especially since we serve the community and it is great to feel that staff is feeling well cared for. I felt important. I felt that my employer cared for my well-being.”

“The hiking series is a great idea! I have done them all and the progressive level of difficulty is very thought out. Well done.”

“Hello, Happy Thankful Thursday! I completed my 15-minute walk, in fact I ran a 5K too. Thank you, I am grateful for something fun and lighthearted at work.”