



# State Worksite Wellness Programs Embrace Walk With Ease

INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS BOTH BENEFIT FROM INTEGRATION

Walk With Ease can be used independently as a standalone physical activity program or in conjunction with other lifestyle change programs to encourage retention and sustainability.

## Challenge

Arthritis is the leading cause of work disability in America. The nature of arthritis and its comorbid chronic conditions create barriers that affect individuals' ability to work.

Public sector employees have higher rates of absenteeism than private-sector employees. The burden for this absenteeism and medical expenses falls primarily on the individual's employer.

Approaches for reducing absenteeism align with improving arthritic limitations. For example, arthritis-appropriate evidence-based interventions (AAEBI), such as Walk With Ease (WWE), can reduce absenteeism. In addition, AAEBIs promote low-impact physical activity to reduce joint pain and improve quality of life. The physical and mental wellness gained from AAEBIs can lead to increased workplace presenteeism and productivity.

## Approach

The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) is supporting State Health Departments in their efforts to partner with the business community to expand the reach of WWE and other AAEBIs as a sustainable component of worksite wellness efforts. To start this work, State Health Departments often look internally to ensure that their employees have access to work environments where health is valued, supported, and promoted.

In 2015, Montana added self-directed (SD) WWE to the state employee wellness program, offering an insurance reduction for participation. In 2019, New Hampshire added WWE as a component of worksite wellness efforts for state employees.

Kansas is amid its rollout of SD WWE for 19,000 benefits-eligible state employees, who will earn points toward an insurance premium reduction. South Dakota also incentivizes WWE participation. Employees who complete two-thirds of SD WWE sessions are eligible for a financial incentive.

Walk With Ease provides participants with health education, stretching and strengthening exercises, and motivational tips and tools to start—and continue—walking.

Among the benefits it offers, WWE is:

- A CDC endorsed evidence-based intervention developed by the Arthritis Foundation.
- Easy to implement with flexible delivery modalities, including group-based classes, self-directed formats, and/or the enhanced version.
- Available in English or Spanish.
- Low-cost.
- Available in a self-directed, enhanced, or group format.



## Results

States have been successful in getting employees to enroll in WWE. For example, in the seven years since Montana introduced WWE, 6,087 employees, retirees, legislators, and spouses participated. State data also show that as a component of a workplace wellness program, SD WWE might be effective in increasing physical activity among adults with arthritis and persons without arthritis.

While other states have less state-specific outcome data, enrollment has been good. In New Hampshire, for example, approximately 400 employees participated in the first cohort of WWE. In the years since, the program has begun using wellness coordinators and an Anthem BC/BS nurse health coach to educate employees about WWE. Retirees and dependents can apply to the program, and a mobile app helps to promote the program.

States like Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington also integrate WWE into existing state employee wellness programs. In addition, New York state is promoting WWE to employees via its Employee Assistance Program. To date, 3,600 New York employees have been exposed to Walk With Ease.

Being physically active can delay the onset of arthritis-related disability and help people with arthritis manage other chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

### What is the role of Employers in Implementing AAEBIs?

Employers are purchasers of health insurance and key partners in implementing evidence-based strategies that positively impact employees' arthritis self-management.



Educating employees about the benefits of WWE through wellness coaches, instituting an easy enrollment system through an online portal or app, and offering an incentive like a premium discount have been identified as best practices by states who have already integrated WWE into their existing worksite wellness programs.

By offering WWE to their employees, states are modeling viable worksite wellness programs while also supporting the health of their employees, dependents, and retirees and working to limit health costs borne by their state.