



## Employer strategies to increase preventive screening

As an employer, you have a unique opportunity to establish an environment that supports employees and their family members to get their recommended preventive health screenings. Providing opportunities at the workplace or allowing employees time off to screen for potential health risks increases the likelihood your employees will take steps to prevent and/or manage their health conditions.

Reducing barriers for employees to complete cancer screenings, for example, increases the chances of helping prevent some cancers and detecting other cancers early, when they are most treatable. As a North Dakota employer, Think about the following statistics in terms of your own employees and worksite.

### **In North Dakota:**

- Two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese.
- One in three adults have high blood pressure, but only half of those have it under control.
- One in four adults report never having had a blood cholesterol screening.
- About four in 10 adults have prediabetes, but only one in 10 know they have it.
- About 36 percent of all cancer cases in North Dakota were diagnosed at a late stage (2004-2013).

Imagine what a difference a supportive workplace environment can make in ensuring employees get their preventive health screenings. By leveraging health plan benefits, implementing policies, adding programs and improving communication, employers can ensure their workplace supports the health and productivity of their workforce and their family members.

## How does chronic disease affect your bottom line?

According to the 2015 CDC Chronic Disease Calculator, the total costs (of which employers typically pay the majority of for working adults) related to absenteeism and medical care annually in North Dakota are significant:

- Cancer: \$361 million
- Cardiovascular disease: \$332 million
- Diabetes: \$336 million
- Stroke: \$163 million

*By encouraging employees to prevent and manage chronic diseases, everyone wins.*

Research shows that the health care costs avoided from delaying or preventing the onset of diseases justify the upfront investments made in identifying and reducing existing health risks.

## What can employers do to promote a supportive environment for preventive health screenings?

There are five main areas where employers can have a positive influence on their employees' likelihood to complete recommended health screenings. By implementing strategies in all of the areas, you will have the greatest potential for impact.

### 1. Health Plan Benefits: maximize use of screening coverage through health plan strategies

- Understand how your health plan engages employees through evidence-based quality improvement initiatives.
- Require that your health plan monitors preventive care use and provides feedback to you in your insurance contract.
- Ask what your health plan is doing to improve screening rates. Have them provide examples of where they have seen success in similar industries among different job roles (exempt and non-exempt), etc.
- Determine if your health plan offers incentives to encourage their patients to get timely, appropriate cancer screenings.
- Confirm all employer-sponsored plans have a policy that ensures coverage for preventive services without patient cost-sharing. (Most plans now cover screenings at no cost to the patient, but some grandfathered plans do not cover all preventive services, nor are they required to waive the cost-sharing for these services.)
- Ask about costs associated with a preventive service or screening considered diagnostic by a provider.
- Remove barriers to health insurance access.
- Support efforts for all employees to have health insurance. If you have part-time or benefit-ineligible employees who do not have coverage, refer them to the following resources to sign up for a health plan or get a free screening: [www.getcoverednorthdakota.org](http://www.getcoverednorthdakota.org)

### 2. Policies/Practices: remove barriers for employees to access preventive health screenings

- Encourage all employees to complete a health risk assessment at least every two years.
- Provide onsite preventive health screenings for conditions that can be screened for at the workplace (blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, BMI, tobacco use, nutrition and physical activity).
- Provide an annual wellness day or flex time policy to allow employees to schedule health-and screening-related appointments for themselves or covered dependents during the work week.
- Set up an employee incentive program for screening compliance.

### **3. Supportive Programs in the Workplace: combine screening with support for prevention and management of chronic disease**

- Host a health fair or lunch-and-learn events to educate employees on benefits and preventive care.
- Conduct department/division-wide challenges and feature leadership stories that demonstrate the support to get health screenings.
- Use existing events such as an annual flu shot clinic to promote other health-related screenings.
- Encourage at-risk employees to join the National Diabetes Prevention Program, offered at several locations in North Dakota. Visit [www.diabetesnd.org](http://www.diabetesnd.org) for more information.

### **4. Communication: use a variety of communication tools to educate and remind employees about getting their health screenings**

- Work with your insurance provider to implement targeted screening reminders for enrollees such as birthday cards with age-appropriate screening reminders.
- Plan a pledge card event for all enrollees to pledge to talk to their doctors, get screened, and encourage family and friends to get screened, too.
- Send regular email blasts and/or newsletters with a screening message and support of following the recommended screening guidelines.
- Post flyers, posters, and informational materials throughout your offices.
- Incorporate the importance of screening in leadership messages, indicating a culture that supports health and preventive care.
- Engage executive leadership to “carry the banner” – make a personal appeal.
- Promote your efforts and progress through electronic, social and print media.
- Talk to your peers about the importance of health screenings. Peer-to-peer leadership can be extremely effective.
- In addition to employees, your company may also consider implementing a screening awareness/cause marketing campaign for clients or customers. This type of campaign sends a positive message that you care about the health and well-being of your customers or clients and the community as a whole.

*Use open enrollment season to educate employees on covered benefits.*

### **5. Implement a Wellness Strategy: implement an organization-wide wellness strategy**

- Implement a comprehensive worksite wellness program that includes support for healthy eating, physical activity, stress reduction, preventive health screenings, etc.
- Worksite wellness programs have been shown to enhance the health of employees, decrease absenteeism and presenteeism, build morale and increase productivity.
- Get trained and find the resources you need to start a wellness program at your worksite with at [BCBSND.com/worksitewellness](http://BCBSND.com/worksitewellness).

The early detection health issues and of breast, colorectal and cervical cancer dramatically improves treatment outcomes. However, employees without access to paid time off for preventative health and cancer screenings are less likely to obtain recommended screening tests. Failure to detect disease and cancer early affects employers in lost productivity and by providing paid leave for cancer screenings, employers may realize a healthier workforce and reduce spending on worker compensation and disability costs, replacement costs for ill or injured employees who are absent, and recruitment and training costs for new employees.

It is recommended that at least 4 hours of PTO per individual be granted annually for the sole purpose of preventative health/cancer screenings. (i.e. colorectal, cervical and breast cancer screenings as well as annual physical, hearing and vision testing).

# Key points to consider to develop an effective policy of providing paid leave for preventive health and cancer screenings

## Assess whether you can build on your current leave program or must design a new policy

- If leave is not available for cancer or preventive health screenings, at a minimum add a specific leave for key cancer screenings (i.e., breast, colorectal and cervical cancers) that will not be charged against accrued sick time or other paid time off.

*Determine whether employer currently offers any paid time off outside of general paid sick or vacation leave.*

### Include anti-retaliation provisions

- Prohibit retaliation by supervisors and others against employees using the benefit.

### Prohibit “replacement worker” requirements.

- Do not require an employee to find someone to cover his or her shift during the leave period.
- The policy may require advanced notice to supervisor to ensure shift is adequately covered.

### Maintain central records of leave use.

- Employers who maintain a record of employees’ use of the leave benefit can not only track leave balances, but can also analyze program effect on screening rates (particularly if an anonymous pre-implementation survey is conducted to determine screening rates), identify changes that may benefit the program and ascertain costs of the program.
- The policy should not impose onerous or invasive documentation requirements on employees; sufficient documentation for employer records may be a simple form identifying the type of screening and signature of health care provider.

### If applicable, include union leadership in the process.

- Determine whether employees belong to a union. Any change in benefits may require negotiation and will not take effect until the next contract period.
  - If the paid leave will be an added benefit, with no alteration to existing negotiated benefits, negotiation may not be necessary.
  - Talk to union leadership, identify concerns, include them in the process and earn their support.
  - Check with an attorney or law department to ensure compliance with relevant labor laws.

### Be mindful of Employment Retirement Income and Security Act (ERISA).

- ERISA establishes minimum standards for certain pension and benefit plans maintained by private employers.
- Wages paid during cancer screening leave should be treated as a typical payroll practice. If a separate fund is set up or used for these payments, it may be considered a health or welfare benefit fund and ERISA may govern administration of the program.
- Check with an attorney or your legal department to ensure compliance with relevant labor laws.

**Publicize the benefit.**

- Employees need to know about the new policy in order to use it. Let them know their health is valued.
- Encourage employees to use the new leave time and provide educational materials on preventive health and cancer screenings.

**Information in this document is adapted from the following resources:**

- “Developing a Paid Leave Policy for Cancer Screening,” [www.ny.gov](http://www.ny.gov)
- “What Works,” [www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)

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