



## LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

# Health Care Reform: Comprehensive Workplace Health Promotion Programs

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently announced the availability of \$10 million to establish and evaluate comprehensive workplace health promotion programs across the nation to improve the health of American workers and their families. The initiative is funded from the Affordable Care Act's Prevention and Public Health Fund and is aimed at improving workplace environments so that they support healthy lifestyles and reduce risk factors for chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes.

This Western States Benefit Planning Legislative Brief provides a brief overview of HHS guidance on the workplace health initiative.

### DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

The federal government will award a contract to an organization with the expertise and capacity to work with groups of employers across the nation to develop and expand workplace health programs in small and large worksites. A contract will also be awarded to a second organization to coordinate and administer an evaluation of the overall program. The federal government is currently soliciting proposals from contractors in an attempt to find a private organization to organize and facilitate the implementation of wellness programs in worksites and to distribute the federal funding. The program budget will be approximately \$50,000-\$100,000 per small and medium-sized employer worksite and approximately \$50,000 for a large employer worksite with 500 or more full-time employees. Proposals are required to be submitted to the Center for Disease Control by Aug. 8, 2011.

### GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYERS

Once a contractor is selected, it will recruit and work with seven employer cohorts that represent regions across the country. Each cohort will be made up of 10-15 individual employers, which will result in up to 100 employers participating nationally. Each participating employer will receive a full-service wellness program for a two-year period. Employers will not be able to apply for the HHS workplace health initiative until a contractor has been selected to oversee the program. At this point, no federal guidance exists to indicate how employer groups will be able to apply for the HHS program. However, some guidance exists in regard to the criteria the contractor will use to select companies for participation.

#### Eligible employers must have the following characteristics:

- Demonstrated leadership commitment and support from the CEO/C-suite including a commitment to allow employees to fully participate in voluntary workplace health protection and promotion program activities, such as by allowing flexible scheduling of program activities;
- Cannot currently have a workplace health program in place that consists of a majority of the initiatives the contractor will be required to implement such as smoking cessation programs, weight management programs, classes or seminars on health-related topics;

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- Only domestic employees and worksites will participate;
- For the largest employers (those with 500 or more full-time employees), the ability of the employer to invest a matching amount of funds, equal to those provided by the contractor up to \$50,000, into the company's workplace health program. This can include staff time related to the workplace health council or committee or support for additional interventions implemented during the project period.

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS IN THE PROGRAM**

Participating employers will be required to:

- Educate employees about good health practices and establish work environments that promote physical activity and proper nutrition and discourage tobacco use—the key lifestyle behaviors that reduce employees' risk for chronic disease;
- Support evidence-based initiatives to build worksite capacity and improve workplace culture in support of health. Examples of such strategies include establishing tobacco-free campus policies, promoting flextime to allow employees to be more physically active, and offering more healthy food choices in worksite cafeterias and vending machines; and
- Maximize employee engagement in designing and implementing the programs so they have the greatest chances of success.

Western States Benefit Planning will continue to monitor health care reform developments.

*Sources: Department of Health & Human Services and Federal Business Opportunities*

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