



# A Culture of Wellness

The Hopkins County government's wellness program improves employees' quality of life and saves money for the taxpayers.

“I have always struggled with my weight,” said Sheila Hopper, the administrative assistant in the Hopkins County Sheriff’s Office. “I probably lost the same ten pounds a hundred times.” But when the county government started an employee wellness program in 2004, Hopper said the fitness and nutrition information they offered pulled it all together for her. “I finally learned how to do the right things. I lost 30 pounds and have kept it off for eight years. My cholesterol levels improved. It has absolutely changed the way I feel. I used to be so tired at the end of the day and now I have much more energy.” And Hopper is not the only person who found the wellness program life changing. Her co-workers, Linda Todd and Punkin Arnett, lost 80 and 100 pounds, respectively.

In eight years, the Hopkins County Government, based in the county seat of Madisonville, has created an enviable culture of wellness in its workplaces. Imagine working in a place where eating healthy and exercising are the norm, and many of your co-workers have lost weight and kept it off for years. Picture healthy potlucks and fitness equipment available for use in your building, plus financial incentives and time off work to attend high quality wellness programs. Envision top administrators serving as role models, losing weight and giving up smoking. These are realities for Hopkins County’s 150 employees.

According to County Treasurer Cindy Jones, the administration started the comprehensive wellness program after an insurance agent with the Kentucky Association of Counties (KACo) said it would lower their insurance premiums. So far, Jones estimated, the program has saved the county 10-15% in insurance costs. She gives much of the credit to Carol Donnelly of K. C. Wellness, the program’s administrator. “We used a high quality wellness provider,” said Jones. “You can’t just do this on your own. You have to have someone who knows what they’re doing. K.C. Wellness has offered excellent services.” These



**Captain Mike Lewis of the Hopkins County Jail uses a weight machine in the break room. He has lost 40 pounds.**

services include assessment of employees’ health issues, goal setting and data collection for the organization, workshops, health fairs, coaching, and weight loss and fitness challenges.

“I know of no other county government in Kentucky that is more proactive in of-

fering comprehensive wellness services to employees,” said Carol Donnelly of K. C. Wellness. “Right from the beginning they incentivized the program by giving employees \$25 a month toward health benefits if they attended a minimum number of wellness events. They encouraged Public

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Works employees to come in off the road and attend wellness sessions. The employees said, ‘Cool, I can stop digging a ditch and come learn about my health in the air conditioning.’ The first year the wellness program was offered they had a 93% participation rate among employees, which is an extraordinarily high rate in the industry.” The reward for participation has changed over time. “Going forward,” Jones said, “it will be a \$300 monetary award paid in December 2012 for participation. It will not be associated with health benefits. That dollar amount could go up or down in future years, depending upon the decision of the Fiscal Court.”

Hopkins County Jailer Joe Blue said it was a combination of the wellness program and wanting to get fit for a family cruise that inspired him to lose 40 pounds. He said, “I couldn’t be much of a role model if I couldn’t fit into my uniform. My captain lost 40 pounds too. People think if the guys at the top don’t care, why should they?” Blue made a number of changes to help both employees and inmates improve their health habits, lowering medical costs for both groups and reducing staff absenteeism. The changes include putting exercise equipment in the employee break room, improving the food served to the inmates at the jail (less fried food and more whole grains and vegetables) and starting a 1½-acre garden to raise food for the jail kitchen. “Our food is much better since we started the garden. We serve 1200 meals



The Hopkins County Jail has reduced food costs while providing fresh fruits and vegetables and job skills to inmates. Between 2006 and 2011, 33,149 ears of corn, 21,885 pounds of tomatoes and 15,067 pounds of cantaloupe were harvested.

a day. We couldn’t afford to serve all this fresh produce if we weren’t growing it. The garden has given inmates agricultural job skills, better health and cut food costs,” said Blue. Nine inmates have received the Master Gardener certificate and a culinary program teaches inmates cooking skills to increase job readiness. “I want to make sure that when the men leave Hopkins County Jail, they leave with more than they came in with,” Blue said.

### Advice for other communities

**Document results:** Document the changes that occur as a result of the wellness program. “You have to convince the fiscal court that this is worth it,” said Jones. “I put their concerns to rest every year with figures of improved health and money saved.” In 2009, she reported that 66 Hopkins County employees lost 372 pounds collectively in the Jump on Life program. Individual weight loss ranged from one to 49 pounds over ten months with an average loss of 5.6 pounds per person. “People understand if someone loses weight they’re going to be healthier and more productive.”

**Incentivize:** Incentivize the program with money and time off work. Employees will see that you take this seriously and that you care about their health.

**Advisory group:** Set up a wellness committee with representatives from all departments. They can tell you what will work in their area and spread the word about wellness programs to their co-workers.

**Community partners:** Partner with the community. In Hopkins County, the Trover Health System offers county law enforcement officers free membership to its gym, Fitness Formula.

### RESOURCES

**Fast Guide: Worksite Wellness Program Implementation: A Practical Step-by-Step Guide** / Partnership for a Fit Kentucky <http://fitky.org/Default.aspx?id=12> (This site has many other quality wellness tools on the right side of page.)

**Welcoa: Wellness Council of America**  
**website** [www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org)

## Selling Points for Worksite Wellness in Your Community

- At the current rate of increase, the cost of health care to employers will likely be the single most significant detriment to profitability and viability over the next decade.<sup>1</sup>
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 75% of employers’ health care costs and productivity losses are related to employee lifestyle choices.<sup>2</sup>
- Weight gain and weight loss are contagious. People tend to adopt the behaviors of the people around them, whether it’s burgers and sodas or walking and salads.<sup>3</sup>
- A review of 73 published studies on worksite health promotion programs shows an average return on investment of \$4.30 for every dollar spent on wellness programming.<sup>4</sup>
- Healthy employees boost a company’s bottom line. They take less sick time, fewer disability days, run a lower risk of premature death, and are more productive.<sup>5</sup>

### Healthier Worksite Initiatives in Government Agencies

website / Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/index.htm>

### Hopkins County Jail Garden

<http://www.hopkinscountyjail.com/CommunityService/garden.html>

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Cindy Jones, Hopkins County Treasurer:  
[cjones@hopkinscounty.net](mailto:cjones@hopkinscounty.net)

Joe Blue, Hopkins County Jailer:  
[joe.blue@hopkinsocuntyjail.com](mailto:joe.blue@hopkinsocuntyjail.com)

Carol Donnelly, President, KC Wellness:  
[cdonnelly@kcwell.com](mailto:cdonnelly@kcwell.com)