

Panhandle Public Health District

The Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD), which serves more than 50,000 residents in 10 counties of the rural Nebraska panhandle, collaborated with the Scotts Bluff County Health Department in 2011–2012 to engage more than 760 people in an assessment and community health improvement planning process guided by recommendations from CDC, the National Prevention Strategy, and *Healthy People 2020*. The Community Health Improvement Plan that resulted is aimed at strengthening the regional infrastructure for cross-sector action to increase the number of Panhandle residents who are healthy at every stage of life. The majority of strategies in the plan focus on creating supportive environments in worksites, schools, and child care centers.

Recognizing that workplace conditions have a major impact on physical and mental health, PPHD has developed extensive programming in collaboration with employers. The Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council, a collaboration of PPHD and over three dozen employers whose reach ranges from local to National, serves as a conduit to enhance policies, systems, and environmental supports in the workplace so that the healthy choice becomes the easy choice. Members of the Worksite Wellness Council are advancing NPS recommendations in the following areas:

- **Healthy Eating:**

- » Offering water and diet juices in company refrigerators
- » Adopting healthy meeting guidelines to increase fruit and veggie offerings
- » Providing a room, refrigeration, and time for breastfeeding mothers to express their milk

- **Physical Activity:**

- » Using break time for physical activity
- » Providing walking workstations

- **Injury and Violence Free Living:**

- » Implementing distracted driving policies

- **Mental and Emotional Well-Being:**

- » Creating flextime policies to better balance personal and work obligations

- **Clinical and Community Preventive Services:**

- » Hosting evidence-based programs like National Diabetes Prevention Program directly on site

- **Tobacco Free Living:**

- » Establishing tobacco-free campuses



Outfitters at Cabela's, member of the Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council, start their morning with stretching exercises during Cabela's annual wellness week.

One in five employed persons in the Panhandle benefits from the implementation of these worksite wellness initiatives. PPHD also supports people's ability to take an active role in improving their health. The National Prevention Strategy's health literacy recommendations prompted PPHD to participate in the Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors Rural Opportunities Project. This project provides training and technical assistance for area health care and social service providers to implement components of the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy.

Kim Engel, Health District Director, connects the importance of NPS recommendations for Empowered People with the worksite wellness and health literacy initiatives, stating: "PPHD is working to empower Panhandle residents to have the knowledge, ability, resources, and motivation to make healthy choices." 🌱