

# The Case for a Comprehensive Workplace Wellness Initiative for NYC Municipal Employees



HEALTHY WORKFORCE. HEALTHY CITY.

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**NYC Office of Labor Relations**

*Prepared by*

**Leslie F. Boden, MSUP**  
Leslie Boden Consulting

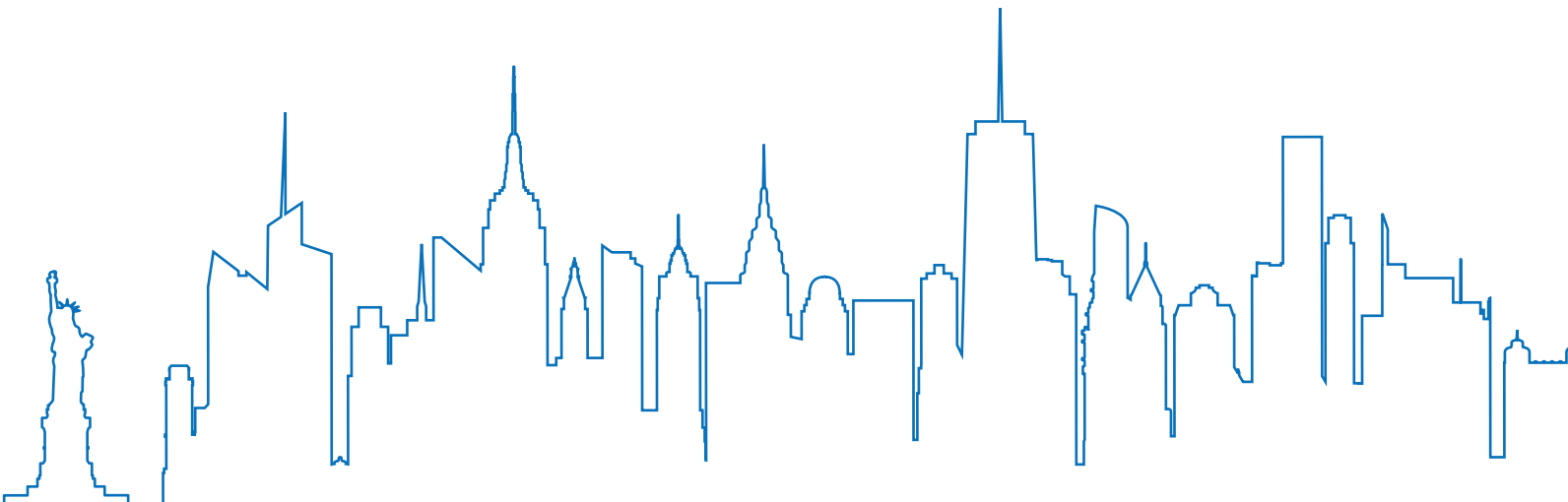
**Andrew Goodman, MD, MPH**  
New York University College of  
Global Public Health

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# Introduction

New York City's roughly 380,000 municipal employees power our vibrant, safe, and thriving city. New York City's workers need to be healthy to be productive and effective at work and in their communities. A worksite wellness program enables city workers to live healthy, productive lives and deliver the best public services in the nation.



# Executive Summary

## Why NYC Should Invest In its Municipal Employee Workplace Wellness Initiative

New York City's roughly 380,000 municipal employees power our vibrant, safe, and thriving city. Yet, as in the city's general population, many employees suffer from or are at risk for preventable diseases or mental health challenges—hypertension, obesity, diabetes, and depression, among others—that diminish their work performance and impact their quality of life. New York City's workers need to be healthy to be productive and effective at work, at home, and in their communities. Investing in a comprehensive workplace wellness initiative will reduce health care costs and enhance efforts to attract well-qualified candidates to civil service employment. Most importantly, it will enable city workers to live healthy, productive lives and deliver the best public services in the nation.

WorkWell NYC, an innovative workplace wellness program of the New York City Office of Labor Relations in collaboration with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), ThriveNYC, and the leadership of the city's unions, has taken initial, successful steps to improve the health of NYC's municipal workforce with a spectrum of evidence-based health promotion programs that have been enthusiastically embraced. WorkWell NYC can have the urgently needed deep and broad impact on the health of the city's employee population if this initiative can be sustained, expanded, and disseminated further. WorkWell NYC is well positioned to make an important contribution to reaching the de Blasio administration's goals of health, equity, and resiliency for all NYC residents.



Benefits of workplace wellness initiatives

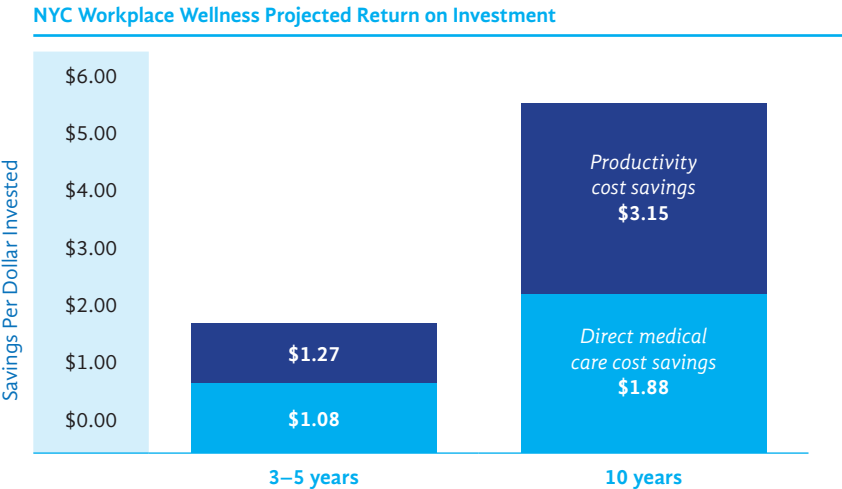
Worksite wellness programs that are well designed, well implemented, and have strong leadership support can result in numerous benefits for employees, employers, and the public that depends on myriad government services. These include:

- Improved employee physical and mental health, including reduced stress and mental health issues.
- Reduced health care costs. Return-on-Investment analyses of comprehensive workplace wellness programs show medical care cost savings of \$3.27 per dollar spent, after initial start-up costs, which increase over time. A recent Return-on-Investment analysis conducted for NYC, with conservative assumptions, projected a positive ROI on direct medical expenditures within five years (\$1.07 ROI per dollar spent) and growing over time (\$1.88 at ten years).\*
- Improved productivity due to reduced absenteeism, presenteeism (coming to work but not fully functioning due to illness or injury), and short-term disability, and improved employee retention, recruitment, and job satisfaction. While these improvements have enormous non-monetary value in the workplace, their benefits are also generally shown to result in a ROI of \$2.73. The recent ROI analysis for NYC projects a savings of \$1.27 within three years and \$3.15 at ten years, in addition to savings of direct medical expenditures.

WORKSITE WELLNESS PROGRAMS THAT ARE WELL DESIGNED, WELL IMPLEMENTED, AND HAVE STRONG LEADERSHIP SUPPORT CAN RESULT IN NUMEROUS BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES, EMPLOYERS, AND THE PUBLIC THAT DEPENDS ON MYRIAD GOVERNMENT SERVICES.

“WorkWell NYC has been able to bring programs that people are excited about to workers at their jobs, with the added bonus of improving both morale and productivity.”

—RENEE CAMPION  
Commissioner,  
Office of Labor Relations



\*Goetzel, Ron PhD, A Return-on-Investment (ROI) Analysis Resulting from a Comprehensive Risk Reduction and Health Promotion and Well-Being Program for City of New York Employees, September 2018.

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“By focusing attention on mental and emotional health, WorkWell NYC's new Be Well initiative of ThriveNYC gives our members skills, activities and positive, new habits to maintain and enhance all aspects of their wellbeing. Our goal is simple: keep people healthy and lower their risk of costly and devastating chronic illness.”

—**HENRY GARRIDO**  
*Executive Director*  
*AFSCME DC 37*

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“The agency's mission is to promote and protect the health of all New Yorkers. This starts with making sure we promote and protect health for our workforce and their families.”

—**DR. OXIRIS BARBOT**  
*Commissioner, Department of*  
*Health and Mental Hygiene*

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## What's needed to realize the known benefits

The workplace is a natural and powerful place in which to promote health among workers, who typically spend about half of their waking hours there.

No element is more pivotal than senior executive leadership in promoting a culture of health and wellbeing in the workplace. Agency and union leaders are able to model behaviors by engaging in workplace health programs, steering organizational plans, priorities and policies, and committing resources to implement approaches that work. In organizations with leadership support employees are more likely to engage in health promotion programs, recommend their employer to others, be motivated to do their best, and are less likely to leave their jobs.

For worksite efforts to be effective, employers must go well beyond health education sessions or on-site physical activity classes and establish an organizational culture of health, defined as “a workplace that places value on and is conducive to employee health and wellbeing,” a critical underpinning to successfully improve the physical and mental health of employees. Cultivating a workplace culture of health is essential for a worksite health promotion initiative to achieve its potential fiscal, health, wellbeing, engagement, and productivity outcomes.

Programs with all of the following ingredients have been shown to succeed in realizing the value of investing in employee health and wellbeing:

- ① Organizational leadership.
- ② Dedicated team of managers, union representatives, and workers.
- ③ Data-driven strategy built on workplace health assessment.
- ④ Operating plan that includes program and implementation planning and management.
- ⑤ Comprehensive, varied, integrated programs and activities.
- ⑥ Policies and practices that support workplace wellness goals.
- ⑦ Strategic communications.
- ⑧ Evaluation that determines impact and allows for program refinement.

## CALL TO ACTION

### Join With WorkWell NYC to Grow Its Impact on NYC Employees' Health

The value and benefits of a comprehensive approach to promoting municipal employee health and wellbeing are clear. Building on the foundation laid by WorkWell NYC and ThriveNYC a comprehensive workplace wellness initiative should be developed and advanced by senior agency and union leaders across all city agencies, as ThriveNYC has been championed by Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray. In addition, meaningful steps to influence the health of a sizeable population devoted to public service can be taken within individual agencies, tailored to each agency's own needs and capacities, regardless of whether such a citywide initiative is adopted. By building on the strong expertise and foundation created by WorkWell NYC, New York City can realize the benefits through actions big and small that multiply the impact of what already exists.

There is already momentum within many agencies and unions for generating a culture and environment that promotes workers' physical and mental health. Consider opportunities to help that momentum grow beginning with these seven opportunities (see chart at right).

Preventable health problems diminish the quality of city workers' lives, their productivity at work, their engagement as productive community members, and the quality of the services they deliver. WorkWell NYC provides a ready foundation of expertise and resources for a robust workplace wellness initiative for all city employees. Seizing on emerging opportunities to implement comprehensive workplace wellness efforts within agencies will increase workforce health literacy and education and enable city employees to make more strategic use of their medical benefits, have better health, and provide better service while lowering costs for the City, agencies, and employees alike.

# 7 WAYS TO MAKE AN IMPACT



**Partner with the WorkWell NYC team** to assess what's working and what's needed in your agency and see what more can be done



Create a **steering committee of union representatives and management** to jointly identify opportunities for work environment policy and practice changes



**Provide training to supervisors and managers** in stress reduction methods to improve work environments and cultivate a culture of health



**Assign a staff member to be a Wellness Coordinator**, or create a new staff position for one, to take the lead in promoting health and wellbeing



**Ask your agency's Wellness Ambassadors what they've learned** are the most pressing needs to expand the impact of your agency's wellness efforts



**Provide recognition** for the efforts of your agency's Wellness Ambassadors and Coordinators



**Increase your visible participation in wellness activities and encourage managers** to do the same