

This case study series aims to support City agencies to foster a [Culture of Health](#). Agency-specific worksite wellness programs, with strong leadership support, can have [broad impacts](#) for employees and agencies, including improved health & well-being, improved job satisfaction & retention, improved productivity, and reduced absenteeism.

Working Well at New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

The [New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene](#) (NYC Health) prioritizes worksite wellness. In partnership with WorkWell NYC, the City's workplace wellness program, NYC Health developed a wellness initiative in 2015 to support agency staff. The collaboration allows NYC Health to take responsibility for the wellness program, while WorkWell NYC remains available to provide support on an as needed basis.

NYC Health is the oldest municipal public health agency in the U.S. and—with over 7,000 employees—one of the largest in the world. The agency's wide range of programs and services, offered throughout New York City's five boroughs, include restaurant inspections, neighborhood-based clinics, epidemiological research, health education and promotion, and vital records.

How did NYC Health start their wellness program?

In 2015, Health Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett began working with the Office of Labor Relations, led by Bob Linn, to develop a formal, coordinated Citywide wellness initiative that became WorkWell NYC. As part of these efforts, funds were allocated to hire a full-time wellness staff member who would develop, lead, and implement initiatives for a formalized NYC Health Worksite Wellness Program.

The agency launched its first wellness survey in 2015 to learn about the types of activities and resources staff were interested in, and to get insight into their overall well-being. While the assessment was not as in-depth as today's annual wellness survey, it provided valuable insight that helped build a program that was always focused on the needs and

interests of staff. Once the agency's full-time wellness lead was hired, he used this survey to build the current program that exists today.

What led to the success of the NYC Health wellness program?

NYC Health has built a responsive, sustainable model by taking action towards the eight Culture of Health principles.

1. Visible commitment of organizational leaders

As described above, a former Health Commissioner was instrumental in developing a citywide worksite wellness initiative and the agency wellness program.

Subsequent commissioners have championed worksite wellness, expanding funding and resources to provide additional staffing for the wellness team.

Commissioners and other agency leaders have promoted the wellness program through agency-wide communications and by attending wellness activities to set an example for others. Worksite wellness is also integrated into leadership decisions that support the workforce.

“We weren’t really flush in the last couple of years, but the former Commissioner... decided this was his priority—to make [the wellness program] bigger... We had to put a budget proposal together and we had to defend it, explain it, and it was tweaked and changed ... but we ended up getting several positions funded ... Yeah, I would say it’s agency leadership.” – NYC Health staff member

“We have done flu shots where the Commissioner has come to get a flu shot on-site at a[n agency] event rather than with their physician or their pharmacy in their own private time, things like that. We’ve done some mental health support groups where the current acting and the previous Commissioners have been present ... When we have these leaders present and participating and even promoting, whether that’s in their communications that they send out, or word-of-mouth, or email, it gives validity to the work.” – NYC Health staff member

2. Dedicated team of managers, union representatives, and workers collaboratively developing, implementing, and evaluating wellness programming

The NYC Health Worksite Wellness Program consists of full-time and part-time staff members who design and implement wellness activities across more than 30 worksites in NYC. Wellness staff work in collaboration with a network of agency

Ambassadors and Champions, other NYC Health colleagues, other City agencies (e.g., Office of Chief Medical Examiner, Parks Department), healthcare and community organizations (e.g., American-Italian Cancer Foundation and Carnegie Hall), and WorkWell NYC to implement a range of holistic wellness programming. Additionally, internal collaboration with managers and executive leaders facilitates integration of wellness activities into meetings and events convened for other purposes.

“So, really, everything does stem from us as a team, so us as the six [wellness staff]. But we use our various resources—both internally within the agency and then, I would say, externally, being WorkWell [NYC] and their resources—to facilitate any additional needs that we might have.” – NYC Health staff member

“[Our Champions are] just staff who want to be engaged in wellness, and they’re so nice. They help us table. They come to a lot of our events. We give them nice worksite wellness shirts. They look like they’re part of the team, because they are, even though they’re volunteers. They help us give out our food boxes from the farm share.” – NYC Health staff member

“I feel like getting to a meeting where there’s 300 people, there’s no way I would have reached those 300 people if I didn’t connect with the managers, the assistant commissioners, and the leaders, pitch what we offer, share this strategy. And then now—we even help teams build out those planned calendars, too, for long meetings.” – NYC Health staff member

“WorkWell [NYC] does a really good job in engaging [NYC Health wellness staff] as Ambassadors, as well. So, they hold regular meetings. And in these meetings, they bring all of the City agencies’ wellness Ambassadors … They share highlights from various programs. We get to engage with our counterparts in other agencies. So, that’s always nice as far as networking opportunities and taking lessons from what’s working and not working, from different people across different environments.” – NYC Health staff member

Although a team was considered essential, the personal qualities of particular individuals—including their dedication and skills—were also emphasized.

“I was given a dedicated resource to hire a director … I’m thrilled that he’s still with us today. He really built this program, really on his own, and with some

summer interns here and there. But he was a mighty force of one, plus some interns for years.” – NYC Health staff member

3. Data-driven strategy built on workplace health assessment

The NYC Health wellness team conducts an annual staff survey to assess interest areas, satisfaction, and perceptions of outcomes. Findings are shared back and help to ensure supervisor and management support for wellness activities.

“[We do] an annual survey. We ask people, ‘What would you like to see and what do you like? What do you want more of? Less of? Do you think this has made a difference to you?’ ... We get a lot of great feedback. I think even if people don’t participate in the activities, they love seeing the weekly newsletter, the announcements about all these things.” – NYC Health staff member

“Starting [with supervisory meetings], meeting people, attending these meetings, and then giving them their data and saying, ‘This is what your team is saying. Here’s where they need help.’ ... Those are some things that have helped with getting supervisor and manager support.” – NYC Health staff member

4. Operating plan that includes program and implementation planning and management

NYC Health wellness staff develop plans and procedures for specific activities. The plans help staff and collaborators track steps required for implementation, including preparation, convening, and evaluation.

“We do have a workflow to help facilitate the various logistical aspects from when a request is first coming ... to when it gets implemented, and then the follow-up with the evaluation and confirming attendance and closing out the event. So, we do have a developed work plan ... The work plan also helps to direct where these individual requests go and if there is a point-person.” – NYC Health staff member

5. Comprehensive, varied, integrated programs and activities

NYC Health collaborates with WorkWell NYC, other City agencies, and other community and healthcare partners to offer a broad range of activities. These include evidence-based activities, focused on topics including hypertension and diabetes, as well as activities that support well-being more generally. As explained by a wellness team member:

“We've balanced the two: fluffy, not evidence-based with some things that might be evidence-based, some things that are already being implemented in the community or nationally, and just tweaking them to fit a workforce... You have to have both.” – NYC Health staff member

Specific wellness activities include but are not limited to:

- Aerobics
- Chair yoga
- Cooking demonstrations and nutrition education
- Diabetes prevention and management
- Farm share distribution
- Financial wellness workshops (e.g., loan forgiveness)
- Fitness club discounts
- Flu shots
- Hypertension education
- Massage
- Meditation bus
- Mental health first aid
- Paint and relax
- Prostate cancer screening
- Sexual assault awareness
- Stress management

The agency has also found opportunities to integrate teams like Human Resources and Workforce Development with wellness. This allows cross-branding and increased participation. One such partnership is their financial wellness and loan forgiveness support resources. Typically seen as an HR benefit, Public Service Loan Forgiveness has been promoted through worksite wellness as an opportunity to improve financial well-being and be responsive to agency staff (37%) who requested more financial wellness content on last year's wellness survey.

As described in a previous section, wellness activities are integrated into meetings scheduled for other purposes. This approach facilitates engagement of large numbers of staff that might not participate otherwise.

“We have tons of onsite classes as well as virtual classes for people to stay active during the workday. We also partner with some local fitness clubs and places near our main building in Long Island City to offer some discounts to

staff. We also do a lot of prevention programming. We started two diabetes programs this year—for prevention and management... And then, heart health programs, we're trying to do more cancer screenings.” – NYC Health staff member

“February is Heart Health Month. We do things related to heart health. March is National Nutrition Month. We do things related to nutrition to try to maximize on that attention. But I think outside of that, we’re constantly listening, thinking, trying to come up with unique opportunities, and trying to keep our ears to the ground.” – NYC Health staff member

6. Policies and practices that support workplace wellness goals

At the level of the individual manager, practice still varies; at the organizational level, however, there is greater recognition of the health needs of staff, including encouragement of participation in wellness activities. Built environment enhancements have been introduced to make movement the easy choice. Treadmill Walkstations at worksites enable light activity during meetings or daily work. Stairwells have been renovated with motivational signage, wayfinding signage, and audio speakers featuring curated playlists to entice employees to skip the elevator. All floors at their Gotham Center location include clearly marked walking routes with distance markers for quick activity breaks and movement around the floors. Plans are underway to extend walking routes and install Walkstations to other NYC Health sites. Other practice and policy successes include funding and resources for wellness staff, incentives for participation in wellness activities, regular communication regarding wellness, and the integration of brief activity bursts into scheduled meetings.

“I think it makes a big difference to people, feeling like their employer cares about them and is doing something for them and is alert to this and attentive. We can't give big raises, obviously. We can't give bonuses. We can't do much in terms of compensation. But what we can do is show that we care and provide this programming that's free and encourage people to participate and connect with each other. I think that makes a difference.” – NYC Health staff member

“[WorkWell NYC] provides us with incentive items. People love to get stuff... So, we get tons of promotional items from them as well, in addition to various help with vendors and events like that.” – NYC Health staff member

“We try to create ongoing opportunities with managers to incorporate some sort of a wellness component into their meetings. So, for example, I work alongside one of the medical directors who oversees an aspect of the school health nursing program. And we are present and offering some sort of a wellness opportunity at each of their monthly meetings... This is something that that manager and that director for that division has decided that they would want to be a standing component of their meeting.” – NYC Health staff member

“Speaking to leaders, I was like, ‘You know, not like we want to co-opt your meeting, but we would love to.’ And I think they understand. That’s been my strategies, like ‘Hey, why not instead of having the people come to wellness, let’s take wellness to the people?’” – NYC Health staff member

“What we found is, if I host a nutrition workshop, we might get five to 15, maybe 20 people will come. However, if a team of 100 is having a meeting and they’re looking to include something about wellness, we ask them to book a request... We get a lot more engagement that way. We have big meetings, 300 people; they invite us, and then we deliver the message that way, so people are receiving it.” – NYC Health staff member

NYC Health is carefully tracking the impact of federal-level policy changes on staff. Policy and practice change may be enacted by NYC Health in response, as appropriate.

“Given what we’ve been seeing happening and the speed at which it’s happening, we could just reassure our people that we have their backs, we’re watching every minute, we’re sharing everything we know.” – NYC Health staff member

7. Strategic communications

NYC Health communications leverage multiple channels to ensure staff stay informed and engaged. The bi-weekly Wellness Wednesday Blasts are digital newsletters emailed to subscribers, which focus exclusively on agency-wide programs, resources, and wellness challenges. There are also monthly site-specific email blasts tailored to individual locations and highlight on-site offerings of various wellness programming.

Paired with these email blasts, NYC Health publishes a monthly calendar with program descriptions and registration links, maintains an intranet page, and posts hard-copy flyers on workplace bulletin boards. To align offerings with staff needs, wellness team members also present at management meetings to provide program updates and collaborate on strategies to further enhance employee well-being.

“There’s a weekly agency announcement that goes out about wellness programming. There’s a very nice intranet page on SharePoint that has a lot of materials on it. Even just things like flyers … that are posted in pantries around our different locations.” – NYC Health staff member

“[Early on] I did a tour of all the boroughs, and I met a lot of the staff, a lot of the managers. And that was my way of putting a face to wellness … I continue to present at meetings with all the managers, higher level managers. I also attend assistant commissioner meetings from time to time. And then one of the other strategies that helps is when we conduct our annual wellness survey every year, I share all of the results with all of the deputy commissioners and their assistant commissioner or executive director of their admin. And I propose meeting with them to talk about their results and strategies we can use to better support their teams.” – NYC Health staff member

8. Evaluation that determines impact and allows for program refinement

As described above, NYC Health administers a staff survey to assess interest areas, participation, satisfaction, and recommendations. In addition, post-event surveys are administered, and participation levels are tracked.

“Seven thousand staff members means 7,000 interests means 7,000 opinions. So, it certainly is not an easy feat. But one of the things that we have taken pride in… we are constantly searching for feedback and evaluation. So, any time we host an event, there’s always a survey that goes out. Now, of course, that survey is specific to the individual event, but there’s also an opportunity to share additional feedback within that individual survey. In addition to that, we utilize an annual agency-specific survey. And so, in that survey, we try to capture data and information related to participation rates, related to what kind of opportunities staff are looking for in the future. What’s working? What’s not working?” – NYC Health staff member

What are some challenges faced by the NYC Health wellness program?

Challenge: Selection of activities that seem appropriate to a broad range of staff.

Lesson Learned: A comprehensive wellness program can include a combination of evidence-based, evidence-informed, and feel-good activities to match the interests and priorities of staff and facilitate improved health.

Challenge: Bureaucratic hurdles for accessing resources and implementing new activities.

Lesson Learned: Wellness staff need champions with the power, resilience, and willingness to “bust through” hurdles. It is recommended that the wellness director report to an executive leader with the authority to address institutional barriers.

Challenge: Sufficient funding for staff to develop and implement the wellness program.

Lesson Learned: The work of dedicated staff with job responsibilities specifically focused on the wellness program can be supplemented with efforts of interns and by collaborating with wellness staff from partner organizations. It has been important to develop a network of supporters and stakeholders with a variety of roles and based in multiple locations to serve NYC Health staff across worksites.

What do staff say about NYC Health’s wellness program?

NYC Health staff consistently underscore the wellness program’s strong support and diverse offerings. Below are direct quotes from the NYC Health Agency-Wide Wellness Survey conducted in 2024.

“Mastering your Engagement Skills was the most helpful, the Facilitator challenged me in so many wonderful ways. I found the role plays to be extremely helpful, in that they truly set the stage for each of us as individuals to look within ourselves and work together as a team to collaborate in mastering our engagement skills” – NYC Health staff member

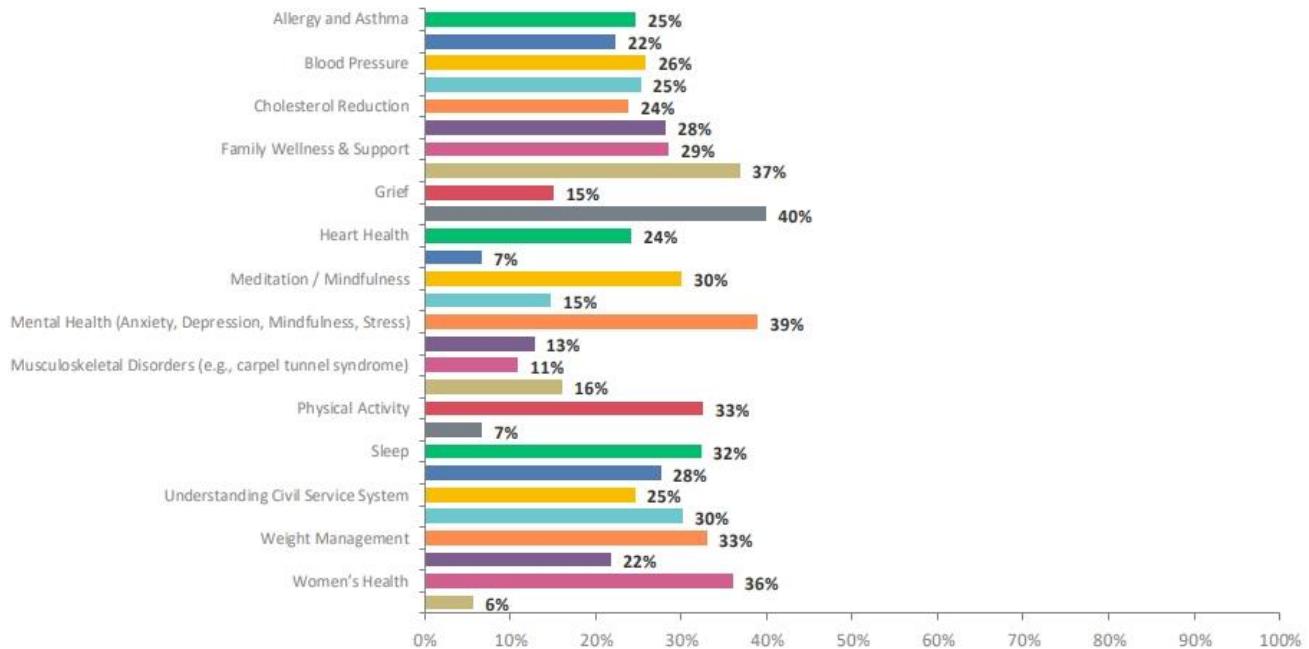
“Fitness classes- I can schedule them right into my day and it's so convenient!” – NYC Health staff member

“I value our educational workshops because they help me understand nutrition and learn how to make healthier choices.” – NYC Health staff member

“The Mental Health awareness is essential because so many people suffer in silence and a high level of awareness provides an opportunity for communication, education and interventions.” – NYC Health staff member

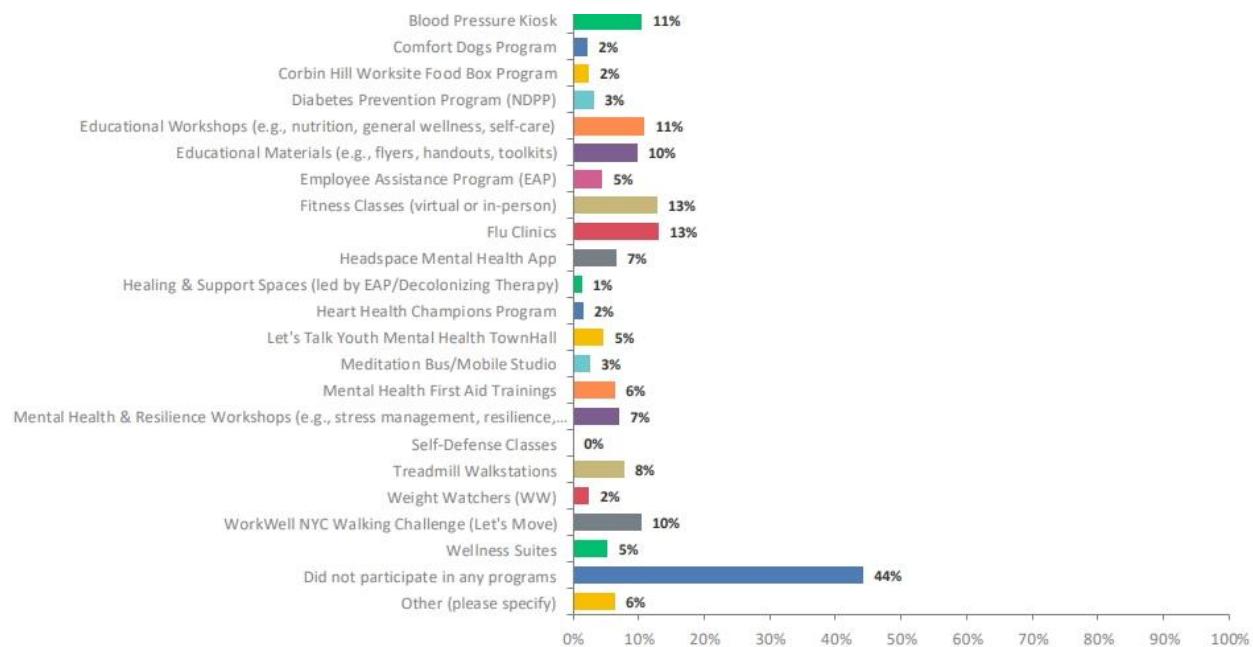
The data in the figures below are from the NYC Health Agency-Wide Wellness Survey conducted in 2024.

Graph 1: Topic areas staff are interested in learning more about



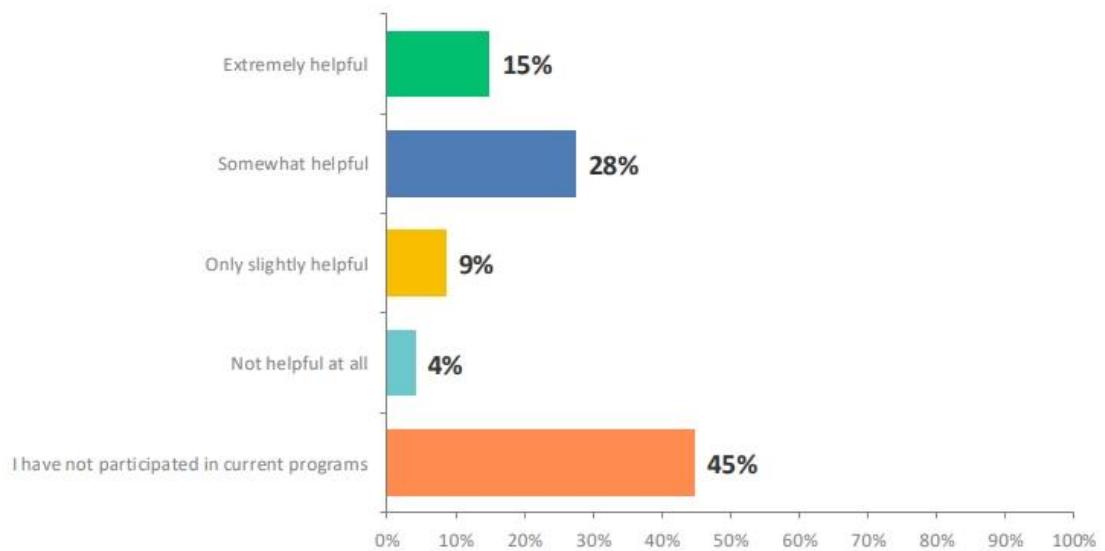
Graph 1 Summary: Results from 1,909 respondents show healthy eating/cooking (40%), mental health (39%), and financial wellness (37%) were the top three areas of interest, followed closely by women's health (36.0%) and physical activity and weight management (30%).

Graph 2: Wellness topics staff participated in within the last 12 months



Graph 2 Summary: Over the past year, more than half of staff participated in at least one wellness offering, with flu clinics (13.0%), fitness classes (13%), and educational workshops (11%) leading the way. Staff were also engaged in self-led initiatives like using a blood pressure kiosk (11%), participating in the WorkWell NYC walking challenge (10%), and using our Treadmill Walkstations (8%), underscoring the broad appeal of diverse programming. It's important to note that a large percentage of staff (44%) did not participate or engage with any wellness programs.

Graph 3: How helpful our program has been in helping staff reach their wellness goals



Graph 3 Summary: Of the staff members who participated in our programs last year, a combined 53% indicated that they slightly, somewhat, or extremely helped them in reaching their wellness goals. Only 4% found them not helpful at all, underscoring strong overall program impact.

Captured below are snapshots of NYC Health's wellness programming in action, showcasing the creativity, camaraderie, and energy that drive our commitment to staff well-being.



- Picture 1 (Top Left): Art Wellness Session for Supervisors
- Picture 2 (Top Right): Staff at JP Morgan 5K Race
- Picture 3 (Middle Left): Comfort Dogs Program
- Picture 4 (Middle Right): Professional Headshots for Staff
- Picture 5 (Bottom Left): High Intensity Fitness Class
- Picture 6 (Bottom Right): Art and Paint Wellness Session for Staff

This case study was prepared in 2025 by Foram Jasani, Sheaba Daniel and Linda Weiss of the Center for Evaluation and Applied Research at the New York Academy of Medicine through a collaboration with NYC Health and WorkWell NYC.

To learn more about a Culture of Health and developing your agency worksite wellness program, visit on.nyc.gov/cultureofhealth.

Want to set next steps for wellness at your agency? Complete the Culture of Health Planning tool (COH). Use the tool to identify key strategies to improve employee health and well-being. Once submitted to us, you will receive a report with the results and guidance to set goals for your agency's wellness program.