

Leveraging Partnerships to Develop a Sustainable Approach to Increasing Adoption of Arthritis Appropriate, Evidence-Based Interventions with Employers



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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHRONIC DISEASE DIRECTORS
Promoting Health. Preventing Disease.



Background, Role & Goals

BACKGROUND

Expanding the availability and accessibility of arthritis appropriate, evidence-based interventions (AAEBIs), also known as lifestyle management programs, focusing on self-management education or physical activity is an effective strategy to reduce the burden of arthritis.

Developing partnerships between public health organizations and employers is critical to raising awareness about the burden of arthritis and to increasing opportunities for arthritis care.

Employers, whether public or private sector, are key stakeholders who can positively impact the health of their employees, employees' dependents, and the broader community. First, as the payers of health insurance premiums, employers should have a vested interest in health education and access, as well as the overall health of their employees. To this end, they also have the capacity to provide a sustainable solution through the incorporation of AAEBIs into worksite wellness programs.

THE ROLE OF NACDD

The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) was funded to develop a successful model for partnering with national organizations, including community-based organizations (CBOs) and state-based business influencers to deliver AAEBIs to employers. For the purposes of this project objective, success is defined as:

1. the establishment of a commercial offering structure that uses non-federal funding to support AAEBI delivery,
2. evidence of embedding or permanency of program offerings or referral processes within a system or organization, and
3. evidence of program delivery sustainability.

GOALS

- To increase financing and other sustainable supports for AAEBI dissemination, delivery and referrals via the development and implementation of an employer/payer infrastructure.
- To increase the availability of and participation in AAEBIs due to the implementation of an effective intervention dissemination and delivery model.

The Basic Questions—Answered

Q: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS?

A: Employers are purchasers of health insurance and key partners in implementing evidence-based strategies that can positively impact employees' arthritis self-management.

- National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD)
- State and Local Health Departments
- Other key partners and organizations with a vested interest, for example, the Arthritis Foundation

Q: WHAT IS A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION?

A: Community-based organizations (CBOs) are national, state or local organizations that provide programs and services to their community.

Q: WHAT IS A BUSINESS INFLUENCER?

A: Groups of individuals who have the power to affect purchasing decisions of employers because of their knowledge, position, and authority. Examples of business influencers include:

- Business groups on health
- Other forums on health
- Chambers of commerce
- Industry specific trade associations
- Purchasers coalitions
- Human resources associations
- Insurance brokers and benefits consultants

Q: WHO ARE POTENTIAL PARTNERS, CHAMPIONS, AND STAKEHOLDERS?

A: Potential partners, champions, and stakeholders are:

- Business influencers
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Community-based organizations
- Employers, public or private sector

Q: WHAT IS WALK WITH EASE?

A: Walk With Ease (WWE) is a six-week walking program designed to help people who are living with musculoskeletal conditions. WWE is one example of an AAEBI that can be integrated into an employer's wellness offerings. WWE is a walking initiative that is used to:

- reduce pain,
- increase balance and strength,
- increase physical activity levels, and
- improve overall health.

Q: WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS IMPLEMENT WALK WITH EASE?

A: Walk With Ease provides participants with health education, stretching and strengthening exercises, and motivational tips and tools to start—and continue—walking. Among the benefits it offers, WWE is:

- Clinically effective evidence-based intervention
- Turnkey solution
- Easy to implement
- Available in a self-directed, enhanced self-directed or group format
- Applicable to most employees
- CDC-endorsed
- Developed by the Arthritis Foundation.

A Step-by-Step Approach to Engaging Employers as Payers of Walk With Ease



STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE PROJECT TEAM AND STRATEGIZE

The lead organization, usually a state or local health department or identified partner or stakeholder, should identify their target business influencers who can convene employers that may be interested in improving their employees' health through the implementation of Walk With Ease. In addition, the lead organization should start identifying partners, champions, and stakeholders who can be part of the project team that works to support Walk With Ease implementation efforts.

Getting started involves:

- Outlining roles and responsibilities for Project Team members.
- Considering internal connections to local employers and business influencers.
- Researching which organizations in your state or

region are working to increase physical activity and self-management of arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions; consider if they would be ideal champions and partners.

- Identifying if your state has a regional coalition that is a member of the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions; if so, contact them.
- Outreaching to local CBOs who have trained Walk With Ease group leaders and who are delivering Walk With Ease and other evidence-based interventions, such as the National Diabetes Prevention Program, in your community.
- Identifying additional stakeholders and champions who can support your efforts.
- Attending chamber of commerce meetings to meet influencers and potential employers.

STEP 2: ENGAGE EMPLOYERS

The lead organization should work with identified

business influencers to market and promote Walk With Ease to employers who may have an interest. Potential contacts and decision makers within employers include human resources staff, medical directors and wellness coordinators.

Steps to engage employers include:

- Creating a list of prospective employers, including potential contacts and how to reach them.
- Providing information about Walk With Ease that employers can publish in newsletters or publications.
- Adding Walk With Ease as an agenda item to upcoming employee wellness related events.
- Hosting an informational webinar for members or employers to learn about the benefits of Walk With Ease and opportunities to integrate this AAEBI into existing wellness efforts.

 **STEP 3: CONDUCT TARGETED EMPLOYER FOLLOW-UP**

The lead organization, with support from the project team, should conduct targeted follow-up with select employers who have the greatest likelihood of implementing Walk With Ease.

Follow-up activities include:

- Answering questions about Walk With Ease, discussing implementation strategies, and working to understand unique employer characteristics that can help the employer’s contact make the business case to implement Walk With Ease.
- Reviewing the benefits of Walk With Ease with key decision makers.
- Distributing articles demonstrating the business case for Walk With Ease and success stories from other employers.
- Facilitating a discussion to better understand employers top health risks, employee wellness needs and interests, and health assessment results.
- Identify opportunities to integrate WWE into

employer’s benefit plan and wellness efforts by asking probing questions about the plan structure, existing wellness offerings and the workplace culture.

- Discussing strategies other employers have used to engage employees as Walk With Ease participants.
- Determining whether the organization has internal capacity to implement WWE, or would be better suited to partner with a CBO for program implementation.

 **STEP 4: GAIN COMMITMENT FROM EMPLOYERS**

The lead organization, supported by the project team, should outline the roles and responsibilities of each party and draft a contract to implement Walk With Ease.

The process for securing commitment involves:

- Drafting a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other formal agreement that is shared with the employer for signature. An MOU should outline specific responsibilities.

 **STEP 5: PLAN FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

Together, the lead organization and employer should develop an implementation schedule and timeline for key activities.

Consider the following:

- Identify eligible population and incentives
 - » Who will the program be offered to?
 - » What employees are eligible to participate?
 - » Will there be an incentive used to encourage participation?
- Marketing and promotion
 - » How will WWE be marketed and promoted?
 - » What types of engagement fliers and other promotional materials can be used and how will they be shared?
 - » Will WWE be integrated into employee benefit and engagement strategies?
- Define format

- » What format of WWE will be implemented, the self-directed, enhanced self-directed or group version?
- » What communication tools and resources are necessary to support each format type?
- Book distribution
 - » How will Walk With Ease guidebooks be distributed to participants?
 - » Will employees have the option to select guidebook or e-book?
- Preparing staff for the launch
 - » Determine which employees will be involved in the Walk With Ease efforts.
 - » Educate staff about the benefits of Walk With Ease and protocol employees will take to register.
- Follow up and data collection
 - » What data should be collected and how can it be used to document the impact and effect of WWE on participants and your organization?
 - » What strategies or incentives will be used to encourage participation in pre and post data collection efforts?
 - » How will participant progress be monitored and encouraged?
- Analysis and reporting
 - » Who will analyze and summarize the data?
 - » How will the impact and business case be documented and shared?



STEP 6: LAUNCH, THEN DOCUMENT SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The project team should continuously document successes and challenges—and how they were overcome. Information should also be captured on lessons learned, barriers, and steps taken in an effort to revise and refine the employer engagement process.

Here are some questions for consideration:

For the Project Team:

- How did the project team decide which employers to target for WWE?
- What did project team do to engage employers in

WWE and was it successful?

- What messaging resonated with employers regarding the benefits and motivations to implement WWE?
- What are the key lessons learned? What worked? What didn't work? What should be done differently next time?

For the Employer:

- How did the employer garner buy-in from individuals to participate in WWE?
- What factors helped the employer to decide to implement WWE?
- What were the facilitators and barriers in WWE implementation and how did the employer address and overcome those barriers?



STEP 7: SUSTAINABILITY AND NEXT STEPS

The lead organization and employer should make a plan to evaluate and share their data in an effort to integrate Walk With Ease as a sustainable wellness offering.

Sustainability actions include:

- Assessing the qualitative and quantitative data and presenting it in a way that can help demonstrate the return on investment for employers. Consider the impact on metrics such as self-related health status, physical activity levels, pain, fatigue, confidence in exercising, program satisfaction and productivity.
- Brainstorm ways to integrate Walk With Ease into benefit and wellness policies.
- Discuss future plans to offer WWE to employees.
- Discuss opportunities to integrate Walk With Ease with other evidence-based interventions, such as the physical activity component of the Diabetes Prevention Program.
- Strategize about the benefits of offering insurance discounts or other incentives for employees who complete Walk With Ease.
- Discuss opportunities to market additional physical activity or walking programs to completers of Walk With Ease who are ready for additional interventions.



Lessons Learned

In its early efforts to establish the step-by-step approach outlined herein, NACDD and its partners have identified some best practices for working with employers. Our hope is to share these in an effort to start a conversation and to provide guidance to others who are interested in replicating this work by partnering with national organizations, including community-based organizations and state-based business influencers to deliver AAEBIs to employers.

Translating public health for an employer audience:

“Arthritis” is generally not a concern for employers, but “musculoskeletal conditions” are. Adopting musculoskeletal terminology resonates positively with employers as it is one of the top drivers of medical costs.

CBOs and other providers of AAEBIs can be good

partners and local resources: Employers are generally not aware of local resources, including CBOs and other community organizations, and the services and benefits that they can provide.

Understanding the unique needs of employers:

Employers are interested in improving their employees’

health, but are looking for experts to understand their unique needs, to be knowledgeable of best practices, and to make appropriate recommendations as to which policies, benefits, and programs would be the most beneficial for their organization. Rather than presenting a generic list of all of the evidence-based interventions, identify what solution would best meet that employers’ need and recommend that one; back it up with reasoning and facts.

Recommending Walk With Ease: Walk With Ease is an easy to implement, low-cost walking program that fits the needs of most employers. The flexibility WWE offers allows it to be easily integrated into an employer’s ongoing wellness programs or it can provide a low-risk starting point for new employee well-being efforts.

Making the business case: Employers are interested in understanding the value on investment (VOI) of well-being efforts. To give WWE the greatest chance of becoming a sustainable offering in an employer setting, the business case must demonstrate its impact on metrics such as medical claim savings, recruitment and retention efforts, and productivity gains.

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