

Houston Wellness Association Campaign to Improve Wellness (USA-Public-Private)

<http://www.houstonwellness.org>

Section I: Summary

The Houston Wellness Association is a private sector led campaign to improve the health of the City of Houston's population through multiple initiatives focused on issues such as childhood obesity, workplace wellness, and seniors' health. Through symposia, educational forums, events, and programs, the Houston Wellness Association is engaging private sector businesses and supporting community partnerships in an effort to improve the health of the City's 2.1 million citizens.

Section II: Statement of Purpose

In 2006, after three years of Houston ranking as the "fattest city" in the United States, the Houston Wellness Association (HWA) was established to promote initiatives aimed at improving the health of all segments of the City's population. Formed in part to further the agenda of the Houston Mayor's Wellness Council, the HWA brought together nine founding partners,¹ from the public and private sector to begin its mission to "transform Houston into a widely-modeled, innovative city for healthy living." The HWA's goal has been to engage and recruit businesses in the healthcare industry and related sectors, such as sports and nutrition, as well as private employers and individuals, to participate in wellness and fitness activities and programs and encourage corporate social responsibility in addressing the population's healthcare needs.

The HWA is a non-profit organization with members ranging from individuals to large companies with 500 or more employees. Members pay an application fee to join (\$50 for an individual, up to \$1,000 for a company, depending on the size), and members can choose to serve on a variety of committees that address various issues or populations (African American / Hispanic Wellness, Children & Family Wellness, Food & Nutritional Wellness, Mental & Behavioral Wellness, etc. There are 12 total standing committees.). HWA members represent diverse industries and job functions: 22% are from insurance, benefits, and corporate wellness; 18% are from traditional medicine; 16% are from consulting, marketing and financial services; and others are from sectors such as government/non-profit, energy, retail, sports & entertainment, and others. In addition to promoting HWA activities, members also personally benefit from networking with other members and gaining access to a database of job listings and other opportunities. In that sense,

¹ The HWA's founding partners were: Minute Maid, Houston Astros, CIGNA HealthCare, Halliburton, Kelsey-Seybold Clinic, Memorial Hermann Healthcare System, Texas Children's Hospital, Wal-Mart, and Westside Tennis & Fitness.

HWA is also a development vehicle for promoting growth and innovation in the wellness industry in Houston.

Section III: Outcomes

The Houston Wellness Association has been successful in establishing a number of events, conferences, symposia and programs to improve wellness education, promote better practices and healthier choices, and encourage Houston youth to consider careers in the healthcare industry. Activities include:

Worksite Wellness Business Forum (WBF): The WBF was established in 2007 as an ongoing forum for people working in the field of worksite wellness to meet and share experiences and best practices from their worksite wellness programs. The WBF holds several events a year on topics such as how to implement a worksite wellness program and ways to use incentives to gain employee participation in wellness programs.

Obesity Forum: The Obesity Forum will begin meeting in 2009 to educate and seek solutions to the rising problem of obesity.

Technology Wellness Forum: The Technology Wellness Forum provides opportunities to educate and share experiences related to the role of technology in improving healthcare.

Bi-Annual Wellness Symposium: The HWA hosted its first Wellness Symposium in November 2008 that included an Obesity Summit and a Worksite Wellness Conference. Over 800 leaders from the private, public, not-for-profit, medical and academic sectors participated in the 2-day event. The Obesity Summit included presentations from over a dozen experts to share ideas and discuss the socioeconomic, environmental, psychological, policy, and community factors related to obesity. The Worksite Wellness Conference included a number of panel discussions related to creating and sustaining effective workplace wellness programs. A second forum is scheduled for 2010 to address strategies for companies and communities to impact health in a challenging economy.

Project GenWellness: Project GenWellness was started in the summer of 2008 to target high school and college students for education in healthier lifestyle choices and promote career choices in healthcare fields. Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States and is home to the Texas Medical Center, the largest medical center in the world. However Houston is considered an "unhealthy" city with growing health disparities, particularly among the younger population. For example, approximately 30% of Houston's population is uninsured, over 21% of area students are obese, and over half of high school students will not graduate in four years. The goals of Project GenWellness are to expose at-risk high school students to the benefits of personal wellness and inspire them to make healthier choices,

provide exposure to careers in health and wellness and opportunities through job shadowing and internships. In 2008 the project had 66 participants; in 2009 the project hopes to reach 500 students.

Additional time is needed to determine whether the Houston Wellness Association can have a significant impact on health outcomes in the City, however HWA appears to be successful in promoting education and dialogue about healthy choices and wellness through its approach of engaging private companies and encouraging collaborative public-private solutions.

Section IV: Additional Resources

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