THE ROLE OF OKLAHOMA BUSINESSES IN IMPROVING COMMUNITY HEALTH

Business is booming in the Sooner State! Oklahoma has nearly 92,000 businesses employing more than 1.3 million men and women of all ages, income levels, and occupations.

Unfortunately, while the health of Oklahoma’s economy is strong, the health of Oklahoma’s residents consistently ranks among the worst in the country. Oklahoma has some of the highest rates of death due to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and stroke, as well as the sixth highest adult obesity rate in the country. Risk factors such as unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and tobacco use contribute to these poor health outcomes. Most adults in Oklahoma consume fewer than the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables per day; fewer than half of adults participate in the recommended amounts of physical activity; and almost one-quarter of adults smoke. In order to improve health outcomes, Oklahomans need to live, work, and play in environments with access to healthy foods, opportunities to be physically active, support for tobacco cessation, and protection from secondhand and third-hand smoke.

Most adults spend nearly half of their waking hours at work and eating several meals and snacks in the workplace. Businesses can actively support the health and wellness of their employees. One effective way they can do this is by developing and implementing a workplace wellness policy to support wellness programs, thereby formalizing their commitment to healthy work environments. Reported benefits of a wellness program include: reduced health care costs; lower rates of sick leave, absenteeism, and workers’ compensation usage; and improved recruitment and retention.

Workplace wellness policies may be effective in sustaining desired changes in the work environment and employee behaviors. The essential goals of a workplace wellness policy are to increase employees’ access to: healthy foods; safe places to exercise and play; and clean, tobacco-free air.

For guidance on how a health and wellness and tobacco-free policies can work for your business, contact Rebecca Griffith of the TSET Healthy Living Program in Garfield and Grant counties at [regriffith@nwosu.edu](mailto:regriffith@nwosu.edu) or 580-213-3168.