

	Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield
	Allegheny County Department of Parks and Recreation
	Allegheny County Law Department Risk Management/Safety Division
	Allegheny County Health Department
	Life Solutions (EAP Program)
	Penn State Extension

Why is Participating in the Wellness Program so Important?

Over the past several years health insurance premiums have risen an average of 11.5% each year and Allegheny County has been faced with finding ways to mitigate the rising cost of health care coverage. The easiest strategies would have been to reduce benefit coverage and/or pass along the cost to the employees. We recognized that these approaches didn't address the fundamental causes of rising premiums – ever-increasing drug prices, a steady rise in chronic illnesses and lifestyle related issues such as smoking, obesity, poor nutrition, lack of exercise and uncontrolled stress. Allegheny County's solution was to take a proactive approach and encourage and reward employees for taking responsibility for their health. Offering Highmark Lifestyle Returns is one way we can encourage employees to take more personal responsibility for their health and, by rewarding employees for their efforts, over the long-run it will help lower demand for medical services and lower the cost of healthcare.

Statistics:

- Preventable illness makes up at least 70 percent of all illness and the associated costs
- The total cost of obesity to U.S. employers is \$13 billion per year *Source: Cost Benefit Analysis and Report 1979-2001, Univ. of Michigan Health Management Research Center*
- Obese Americans spend about 36 percent more on health services and 77 percent more on medications than people of healthy weight. That's more than heavy smokers or heavy drinkers *Source: Rand Cooperation, 2004*
- Workplace alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use costs over \$100 billion each year *Source: Six Reasons Why Health Promotion Makes Sense, Welcoa, 2002*
- Job stress is estimated to cost \$200 to \$300 billion annually in absenteeism, tardiness, and lost productivity *Source: Six Reasons Why Health Promotion Makes Sense, Welcoa, 2002*
- Workers' compensation costs for a smoker averages \$2,189 compared to only \$176 for a nonsmoker *Source: July 2001, Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*