



Snohomish County
Office of the Executive
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County to Launch ‘Partners for Health’

New strategy seeks to combat rising healthcare costs

Executive Aaron Reardon today announced Snohomish County will launch “Partners for Health,” a new long-term health improvement strategy for employees, retirees, and spouses.

“Employers nationwide have experienced rapidly increasing employee benefits costs and Snohomish County has not been immune to this trend,” said Reardon. “Proactive wellness programs can reduce cost increases borne by the County.”

Research has demonstrated that employees with health risk factors – obesity, smoking, inactivity – can cost between 10% and 70% more in terms of healthcare costs than those individuals with no risk factors. The same risk factors are linked to other indirect cost impacts to employers: increased absenteeism, decreased productivity and overtime costs incurred from other employees who must cover for their coworkers.

Participation in Partners for Health will be optional, but heavily promoted, beginning July 1. Some of the programs offered include health risk assessments, annual screenings and confidential feedback from a qualified personal health advisor. Individuals identified as “high-risk” for future disease will be monitored by a health coach. Partners for Health participation also includes free annual flu shot clinics, Weight Watchers at Work, a gym discount program, a healthy food initiative, and other programs designed to help individuals meet their personal health goals.

Fully 50% of any employee’s health status depends on his or her behavior. Partners for Health leverages this principle by focusing on changing the culture within the Snohomish County workplace to promote both healthy living and medical cost reduction.

The overall benefit Reardon says, “Is happier, healthier workers and fewer tax dollars going toward rising medical costs.”

In 2007, it is estimated that the county will pay nearly \$25 million for employee health insurance. Approximately 85% of this cost will be borne by the county and 15% will be paid by employees. The typical Wellness Program can anticipate generating \$1 to \$5 in health benefit savings for each dollar invested and as much as \$8 for each dollar invested when productivity gains are factored in.

Health Fitness Corporation, a third party vendor selected in a competitive bid process, will administer the new wellness program.

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