



# City of Wilmington

## Elevates Employee Health Through Diabetes Prevention

### ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

With a population of approximately 71,000, the [City of Wilmington](#) is the largest and most populous city in the state of Delaware. Wilmington is located 33 miles southwest of Philadelphia in New Castle County in northern Delaware where the Christina River meets the Delaware River. The city has an operating budget of \$240 million and more than 1,100 employees, with approximately 130 employees in executive or managerial roles. City of Wilmington employees serve in a diverse range of roles and locations, including police, fire, water, local health department, and city operations, requiring creative health and benefits designs to maximize health offerings and ensure equitable access.

**“The National DPP lifestyle change program generates a high return-on investment.** Financially, the program is a no-brainer. However, if you think about infusing joy into the workforce, the return is even bigger. COVID-19 slowed us down but did not stop us. I am still sharing healthy plate photos with fellow National DPP participants.”

**Dany Bourjolly Smith,  
City of Wilmington &  
National DPP Participant**

### DECIDING TO OFFER NATIONAL DPP

In 2017, a [City of Wilmington Healthcare Task Force report](#) showed that City of Wilmington employees had serious health conditions at rates higher than the national average. A review of annual employee biometric data, such as weight and A1c levels, showed that City of Wilmington employees had benefits but were not engaged in healthy promotion activities, and many had preventable chronic conditions. For example, only one-quarter of employees had seen their healthcare provider for an annual physical in the last year. An incentivized physician



engagement program was implemented that allowed the city's employee benefits team to receive additional aggregate data to develop an action plan for improving the workforce's overall health. Prediabetes was a clear problem, as indicated by employee A1c results, and the City of Wilmington sought ways to improve employee health rooted in preventive care.

The [Delaware Department of Health and Social Services](#) (DHSS) and the YMCA of Delaware (Y), with support from the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors' (NACDD) [Employer Learning Collaborative](#), reached out to the City of Wilmington's health staff and employee benefits manager about the possibility of starting the National DPP lifestyle change program. DHSS contacted the Occupational Health and Safety Program Manager and City Nurse at their medical dispensary who coordinate occupational health and safety programs and sent emails to the City Employee Benefits Manager who oversees health and welfare efforts. An initial email from DHSS detailed potential long-term costs of prediabetes and type 2 diabetes to the City of Wilmington and mentioned the possibility of working with the Y to implement the National DPP lifestyle change program.

At a cost of approximately \$420 per person\* in an annual health and wellness budget of \$20 million, the City of Wilmington found it easy to make the decision and a good value to invest in employee health and prevention through the National DPP lifestyle change program. The investment is expected to be a critical and necessary step to improving employee health.



**61**  
**PARTICIPANTS**



**ABOUT**  
**\$151k**  
**PROJECTED**  
**SAVINGS**



**5%**  
**WEIGHT LOSS**

## SETTING UP NATIONAL DPP WITH INSURERS AND PROVIDERS

The City of Wilmington is a self-insured employer. Upon review and further discussion with DHSS, it was discovered that the City of Wilmington's employee insurer, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware, was a participating commercial health plan in the National DPP lifestyle change program. Highmark offers two options for the City of Wilmington's employees, retirees, and their families (approximately 3,000 covered lives): preferred provider organizations and one exclusive provider organization. Several health initiatives, including the National DPP, already were built into the plan design. The City of Wilmington could offer the lifestyle change program as a covered medical benefit at no additional cost to employees, retirees, or their covered adult dependents.



Local physicians started to raise awareness, provide education, and refer individuals to the program. Prior to rolling out the National DPP lifestyle change program, approximately nine employees/family members independently discovered the National DPP through physician recommendations.

The Y is a National DPP lifestyle change program provider that had previously worked with the City of Wilmington on other health initiatives. The National DPP provided a new path for the City of Wilmington employees to strengthen a relationship with the Y. The City of Wilmington organized space onsite for the sessions and referred employees to the Y for registration, and the Y handles billing.

## ENSURING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT & PROGRAM COMPLETION

To incentivize employees to participate in the National DPP lifestyle change program, the City of Wilmington subsidized the employee lunch hour so employees would not need to use their entire lunch break to take the class during business hours. The City of Wilmington provided paid time for 50% of the hour-long class, allowing employees to maximize break and lunch time. The Mayor and Chief of Staff approved this concept quickly given the high return-on-investment.

The City of Wilmington also purchased food scales for participants at \$7 each, provided lunch for the first session, and offered incentives and prizes for attending informational sessions. The City of Wilmington also set up an exclusive Microsoft Teams channel for National DPP participants to share pictures of meal preparation and exercise and to foster camaraderie among participants.

**“I cannot recommend this program highly enough. I lost 45 pounds and gave a testimonial to one of the classes. **This program changed my life.**”**

**City of  
Wilmington  
National DPP  
Participant**

## MAKING STRIDES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The National DPP lifestyle change program was rolled out to employees in three informational sessions a day over two days at both the City’s main building and the public works building. Approximately 156 employees attended the informational sessions, and approximately 61 participants enrolled in the National DPP lifestyle change program. At an [estimated \\$2,470 medical cost savings per person](#), projected cost savings were approximately \$151,000.

The City of Wilmington had started three National DPP lifestyle change program cohorts with onsite sessions when the COVID-19 pandemic began. They were four or five meetings into the program when they had to pause for two to three weeks and evaluate how best to continue. Expediently pivoting to online classes, the cohorts continued.



The City of Wilmington felt it was important to meet people where they were, and some people felt more comfortable with in-person classes, opting to wait until it was safe to meet again in person. Despite some minor attrition, they were able to meet a weight loss goal of 5% (goal range 5-9%).

## INTEGRATING NATIONAL DPP INTO A CULTURE OF HEALTH

The City of Wilmington plans to keep the National DPP lifestyle change program as an ongoing, health-building, cost-saving offering for employees and their families. A second round of cohorts began in July 2021 offering a hybrid session to accommodate in-person and virtual classes at the same time.

The City of Wilmington spent time setting the stage for the National DPP lifestyle change program. They had previously created **Wellness in Wilmington**, a digital coupon booklet program that offered city employees discounts when patronizing businesses that offer healthy choices, such as local gyms, retailers, and restaurants. **City Days Out** were held to inform employees and spotlight healthy opportunities at local businesses. This incentivized city employees to make healthy everyday decisions in purchases and activities while supporting local area businesses. To raise engagement and utilization, **Benefit Service Days** were held to encourage employees to download health-related mobile applications and learn about various health offerings. Their annual **Fall Fest Employee & Family Appreciation Day**, featuring a serenity tent, holistic health providers, onsite massage, a farmers' market, and a vegan food truck, also provided an opportunity to create momentum, build a culture of wellness, and earn the trust of city employees.

“The City of Wilmington has been a long-standing partner in chronic disease management. They have done a **tremendous job of engaging employees in the National DPP lifestyle change program** and pivoting from in-person to virtual offerings during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

**Wendy Bailey,**  
**Delaware Department of Health and Social Services**



## INSIDER TIPS & TAKEAWAYS

-  **Research your existing medical plan to determine if the National DPP lifestyle change program is already a covered or optional add-on benefit.**  
The City of Wilmington carefully examined current resources when considering funding options, leading to cost-savings when it discovered that the existing contracted health insurer covered the National DPP lifestyle change program as a medical benefit to employees with no additional costs.
-  **Maximize strategic partnerships with unions to generate program interest and participation during program rollout.**  
The City of Wilmington worked with the police union, the largest of the city's seven unions, and business units to strategically roll out the National DPP lifestyle change program offerings and increase engagement, later expanding rollout to other unions.
-  **Leverage time as an employee incentive for participation.**  
The City of Wilmington paid employees for half of their lunch hour when they took the hour-long National DPP lifestyle change program class, allowing them to attend class and have time for a healthy lunch break.
-  **Involve leaders as visible National DPP champions.**  
The City of Wilmington's mayor is positioned as its Chief Wellness Ambassador. The mayor attended informational sessions and events, helping to raise the visibility of the National DPP lifestyle change program offering and promoting engagement and accountability. Key city employee leaders also participated in National DPP offerings.

\* Service fees apply.



DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
Division of State Service Centers



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

For more case studies featuring employer successes in diabetes prevention visit the Coverage Toolkit's [Coverage in Practice](#) page.

**EMPLOYER NETWORK**  
Preventing Type 2 Diabetes, One Workplace at A Time

Since 1988, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors and its more than 7,000 Members have worked to strengthen state-based leadership and expertise for chronic disease prevention and control in all states, territories, and nationally. Learn more at [chronicdisease.org](http://chronicdisease.org).

This publication is a product of NACDD's National DPP [Employer Learning Collaborative](#) Employer Network and was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number 6NU38OT000286-04 funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services. Icons were sourced from Flaticon.com.

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