

## MESSAGES FOR EMPLOYERS

Million Hearts™ is a public-private initiative led by CDC and CMS to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes in the U.S. over the next five years by focusing the nation on evidence-based **community and clinical prevention** actions. Heart disease and stroke are two of the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, making cardiovascular disease responsible for one of every three deaths in the country. Together, heart disease and stroke are among the most widespread and costly health problems facing the nation, accounting for \$444 billion in health care expenditures and lost productivity in 2010 alone.

Employees at risk for heart disease and stroke can increase the cost of doing business through increased absenteeism, workers' compensation, health benefits, and lost productivity. In 2002, employers paid an average of \$18,618 per employee for all costs related to health and lost productivity. Four of the top ten most expensive health conditions to U.S. employers—high blood pressure, heart attacks, diabetes, and angina pectoris (chest pain)—are related to heart disease and stroke.

### Million Hearts™ priorities include:

- **Empowering Americans to make healthier choices** by preventing tobacco use and limiting sodium and trans fat consumption. This can reduce the number of people who need medical treatment such as blood pressure or cholesterol medications to prevent heart attacks and strokes.
- **Improving care** for people who need treatment by encouraging a targeted focus on the “**ABCS**”—**A**spirin for people at risk, **B**lood pressure control, **C**holesterol management and **S**moking cessation – which address the major risk factors for cardiovascular disease and can help to prevent heart attacks and strokes.

### Your help is vital to the success of Million Hearts™:

- Many of the risk factors for heart disease and stroke are preventable and can be controlled. Strategies related to worksite wellness can lead to cost savings for employers as well as improved health outcomes for employees.

- A review of 42 studies found that worksite health promotion programs can lead to more than 25% reductions in absenteeism, health care costs, and disability/workers' compensation costs.
- A comprehensive worksite health promotion program addressing multiple factors has proven to be the most effective approach to support healthy lifestyles and prevent heart disease and stroke. However, in 2004, only 6.9% of employers offered a comprehensive worksite health promotion program.

**Actions you can take to advance Million Hearts™ at the regional, state, and local levels include:**

- **Align existing employee health initiatives and programs with Million Hearts™ goals.** Examples include education programs, tobacco prevention, worksite wellness programs, and employee or community recognition programs.
- **Pledge your organization's commitment and share success stories on the Million Hearts™ website:** <http://millionhearts.hhs.gov>
- **Educate employees.** Educate employees about the importance of healthful living and the risk factors for heart disease and stroke to empower your employees to take control of their heart health.
- **Create healthy workplaces.** Promote heart health through workplace wellness programs. For example, promote smoke-free air worksite policies, quit lines, and other tobacco prevention policies in your workplace and community. Support policies for healthier food options and reducing sodium and eliminating trans fats in food (e.g., menu-labeling requirements in chain restaurants and employee cafeterias, procurement policies). Check the following CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion>. CDC's Successful Business Strategies to Prevent Heart Disease and Stroke Toolkit is available at [http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/pubs/employers\\_toolkit.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/pubs/employers_toolkit.htm). This Toolkit provides information, materials, tools and resources that employers can use in developing comprehensive heart disease and stroke worksite programs and preventive services.

- **Improve coverage of clinical preventive services.** Include recommended coverage for preventive services, e.g., aspirin, blood pressure and cholesterol screening, treatment, and control, tobacco cessation, healthy eating as a component of employee benefits package.  
<http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/benefitsttopics/topics/purchasers/fullguide.pdf>
- **Offer incentives to employees.** Incentives to motivate employees to participate in health promotion programs are a key to the success of these programs. Incentives could include gift cards, lower health insurance premiums, tuition reimbursement, giveaways such as pedometers, discounts to a workout facility, subsidizing community-based or on-site weight control programs, developing recognition programs for staff adopting healthful eating habits, offering monetary incentives for employees who complete health risk assessments and comply with prevention and treatment measures. [Worksite wellness program](#) information available at the CDC website may be helpful.
- **Support the work of the Community Transformation Grants in your community.** The [Community Transformation Grants](#) program is creating community-level environmental and system changes to reduce chronic diseases.