



State of New Jersey

Department of the Treasury

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Christie Administration Encourages State Workers and School Employees and their Spouses or Partners to Participate in New Wellness Initiatives

Trenton – In an effort to create a healthier workforce, New Jersey State Treasurer Andrew Sidamon-Eristoff and Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd are urging the 245,000 active members of the State Health Benefits Program (SHBP) and the School Employees Health Benefits Program (SEHBP), and their 135,000 spouses or partners, to participate in the new wellness incentive program that will be available to them next year.

The new programs have been approved by the by the SHBP and SEHBP Plan Design Committees and mark the first time wellness incentives have been offered to active public workers in New Jersey on a statewide basis.

The programs will take effect on Jan. 1, 2014 and will focus on building individual health awareness and setting and meeting specific goals. It will feature incentives like gift cards based on points scored in a year based on health assessments for weight, blood pressure, cholesterol levels and changes in lifestyle such as weight reduction or quitting smoking.

During the first year of the programs, participants can earn a \$100 gift card for meeting program goals, with rewards rising to a \$200 gift card in the second year and a \$250 card in the third year.

Employers that achieve high rates of employee participation can earn a premium reduction by the third year of the program.

The New Jersey Education Association will offer wellness screening for its members at their annual convention in Atlantic City on Nov. 7-8, and representatives of Treasury's Division of Pensions and Benefits will be on hand to answer questions at the American Federation of Teachers Delegate Assembly on Oct. 21 in Piscataway and at the Annual New Jersey League of Municipalities Conference in Atlantic City on Nov. 19-21.

"Wellness programs empower individuals to 'know their numbers' so they can take steps to improve their health and reduce risks for heart disease, stroke, diabetes and obesity," said Health Commissioner O'Dowd. "Chronic diseases have a significant impact on the health of our employees, the productivity of our businesses and costs to the health care system. Chronic diseases account for 75 percent of U.S. health care expenditures according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

Indirect costs associated with poor health – such as absenteeism, reduced productivity and disability – make the impact of chronic diseases even greater. The CDC estimates that productivity losses due to personal and family health issues can cost U.S. businesses \$1,685 per employee per year, or \$225.8 billion annually. Similar to the nation as a whole, seven of the ten leading causes of death in New Jersey are chronic diseases.

"The new program represents a win-win partnership that will give employees the structure and support they need to reach their personal health goals while also allowing employers to benefit from the savings that will flow from having a healthier workforce," said State Treasurer Sidamon-Eristoff. The Treasury Department's Division of Pensions and Benefits administers the SHBP and the SEHBP.

One of Commissioner O'Dowd's priority initiatives is building healthier communities, which includes efforts to provide healthier environments where New Jerseyans work, learn and live.

"Employed adults spend a quarter of their lives at the workplace, making it an ideal place to reach them with messages about the importance of healthy eating and becoming more physically active and evidence suggests that worksite wellness programs are cost-beneficial, saving companies money in health-care expenditures and producing a positive return on investment," Commissioner O'Dowd added.