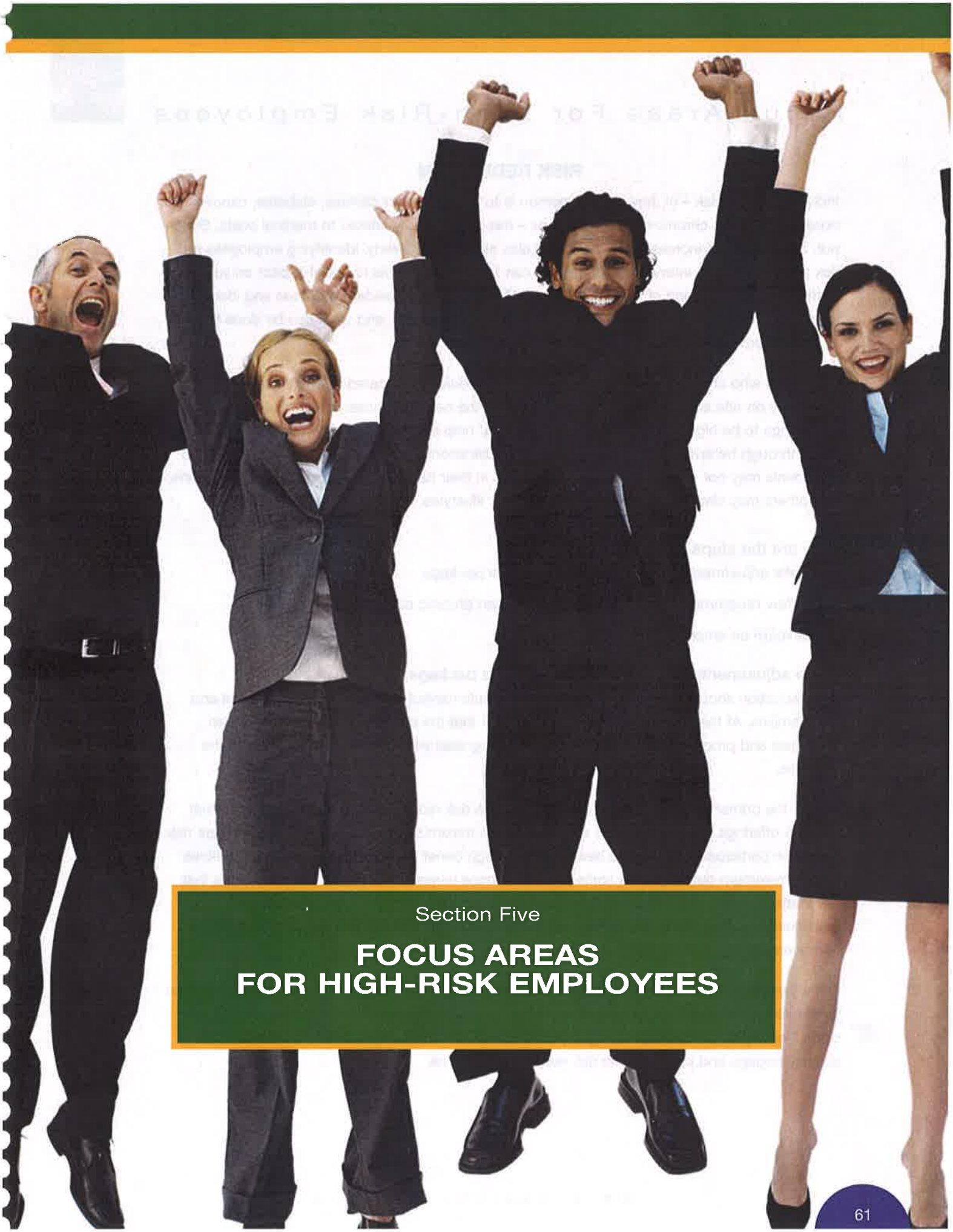

Section Five

FOCUS AREAS FOR HIGH-RISK EMPLOYEES

RISK REDUCTION

Individual health risk – or, how likely a person is to develop heart disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, and other chronic health conditions – has been directly related to medical costs. Simply put, as health risks increase, medical costs also increase.[23] Clearly, identifying employees at risk and focusing on intervention strategies can have a substantial financial impact on your bottom line! This section of the Work Healthy Georgia toolkit provides resources and ideas for identifying who is most at risk for developing a health condition, and what can be done to slow or halt the progression of disease.

Employers who choose to focus on risk reduction should be prepared to implement programs – preferably on-site and on-the-clock – that address the needs of those determined by health risk screenings to be high-risk, including strategies that help employees improve their health risk levels through behavior changes and lifestyle modifications. It is important to note that some individuals may not see significant improvements in their health due to existing predispositions, and others may simply choose not to modify their lifestyles.

Here are the steps you should take:

- *Make adjustments to your company benefits package*
- *Follow recommendations to address common chronic diseases*
- *Develop an emergency response plan*

Make adjustments to your company benefits package...

Risk reduction should always be presented and implemented as a benefit to employees and their families. At the same time, it is recommended that the development of risk reduction strategies and programs be done in a way that integrates with other benefits offered at the worksite.

One of the primary ways to do this is to incorporate risk reduction into the worksite's overall benefits offerings. For example, an effective way to maximize participation is to incorporate risk reduction participation within the health plan through benefit differentials such as deductibles and/or maximum out-of-pocket limits or co-insurance levels. It is important to make sure that the strategy is *tied only to participation* and that it *does not discriminate* based on any individual's level of health, his or her medical condition, or any "results" related to health improvement.

Other benefits that can be incorporated into risk reduction include providing financial incentives (again, *for participation only*), time off, activities that are provided while employees are "on the clock," or any other award or recognition that a worksite feels might motivate individuals to actively engage and participate in risk reduction programs.

Focus Areas For High-Risk Employees

CHRONIC DIESEASES

Follow recommendations to address common chronic diseases...

Individuals with chronic health conditions should receive care that includes education about their health condition, appropriate medical treatment, and referral to self-management programs. Below are some recommendations and resources for selected common chronic diseases:

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Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular Disease accounts for one of three deaths in the United States each year. Strategies that address risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, and tobacco use can greatly reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease. [24]

- Many of the risk factors for heart disease and stroke are preventable and can be controlled. Strategies related to employee health and worksite wellness initiatives can lead to cost savings for employers as well as improve health outcomes for employees.
- A review of 42 studies found that worksite wellness programs can lead to a reduction of more than 25% in absenteeism, healthcare costs, and disability/workers compensation costs.
- A comprehensive worksite wellness program address multiple factors and conditions, they have proven to be the most effective and support healthy lifestyles and prevent heart disease and stroke.
- Heart Disease and stroke can be prevented. Key recommendations for preventing heart disease and stroke include:
    - *Know your blood pressure and keep it under control*
    - *Exercise regularly*
    - *Don't use tobacco*
    - *Know your cholesterol and triglyceride levels and keep them under control*
    - *Eat fruits and vegetables*
    - *Maintain a healthy weight*

Focus Areas For High-Risk Employees

Actions Employers Can Take:

- Align your employee health initiatives and programs with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Million Hearts® goals. Examples include education programs, tobacco cessation programs, worksite wellness programs, and employee recognition programs.
- Pledge your organization's commitment and share your success stories on the Million Hearts® website: http://millionhearts.hhs.gov
- Educate your employees. Create educational sessions or lunch and learns that educate employees about the importance of healthful living and risk factors associated with heart disease and stroke. Empower your employees to take control of their health.
- Include clinical preventative services for your employees. Include recommended coverage for preventative services, e.g., blood pressure and cholesterol screening, treatment, and control, tobacco cessation, and healthy eating as a component of your benefits package.
- Support worksite policies that discourage tobacco use and support healthier food options.
- Distribute information on signs and symptoms of heart attack and stroke. This can be done through posters, email bulletins, pay stub messages, and other communication vehicles. See the American Heart Association website: www.amerianheart.org
- Provide opportunities for screening and identify employees at risk for cardiovascular disease. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute has on online resources on their website: www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- Provide opportunities for physical activity and make heart-healthy foods available on-site for all employees, particularly those at risk for developing cardiovascular disease.
- Post signs and informational materials on the signs and symptoms for heart attack and stroke.
- Assess your worksite wellness program by downloading the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Worksite Health Scorecard. This tool allows employers to assess their program and prioritize approaches to health promotion.[26] The scorecard can be downloaded from www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/pubs/worksite_scorecard.htm

Focus Areas For High-Risk Employees

From the Million Hearts® Action Steps for Employers[26]:

Select High-Impact Strategies for Cardiovascular Health Promotion	
Actions	
High Blood Pressure and Cholesterol Management	• Provide health insurance coverage with no or low out of pocket costs for cholesterol/lipid control medications, blood pressure control medication, or for home blood pressure monitoring devices. [27, 28] • Provide one-on-one or group lifestyle counseling and follow-up monitoring for employees with high blood pressure, pre-hypertension, or high cholesterol.
Tobacco Control	• Provide health insurance coverage with nor or low-out-of-pocket costs for prescription tobacco cessation medications, including nicotine replacement.
Nutrition	• Make most (more than 50%) of food and beverage choices available in vending machines, cafeterias, snack bars, or other purchase points be healthier food items. • Subsidize or provide discounts on healthier foods and beverages offered in vending machines, cafeterias, snack bars, or other purchase points.
Physical Activity	• Provide environmental supports for recreation or physical activity (e.g., onsite exercise facility, subsidized or discounted onsite or offsite exercise facilities walking trails, bicycle racks). • Provide organized individual or group physical activity programs for employees (e.g., walking or stretching programs, group exercise, or weight training).

Diabetes

- Hold worksite educational programs for people with diabetes and those at risk. See Diabetes at Work at www.diabetesatwork.org.
- Screen for those at risk for diabetes using the American Diabetes Association's "Take the Test. Know Your Score," followed by referral to a physician for individuals whose scores are over 10. The diabetes risk test is available online at Diabetes Risk Test: http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/prevention/diabetes-risk-test/
- Provide incentives, such as reduction in co-pay, for medications and testing supplies for individuals who keep their Hemoglobin A1c rate <7% *(used to determine blood sugar control)*.
- Provide nutrition and physical activity training, as well as opportunities for physical activity, for all staff, especially those at risk for diabetes.
- Encourage individuals with diabetes to monitor their blood glucose levels regularly.

Focus Areas For High-Risk Employees

Cancer

- Promote inclusion of existing cessation services, including the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line, in employee assistance and training programs.
- Participate in the Great American Smokeout®. Visit the American Cancer Society website for more information at www.cancer.org.
- Distribute appropriate screening guidelines for breast, cervical, prostate, and skin cancer. This can be accomplished through email, brochures, posters, and other communication vehicles. Resources and materials are available at the American Cancer Society and other cancer prevention organizations.
- Provide information for free breast and cervical cancer screening for eligible women through Georgia's Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. Access to these screening services is available through local county health departments.

Asthma

- Provide information on occupational asthma. Learn more at www.lungusa.org.
- Have employees with asthma take the Asthma Control Test at www.asthmacontrol.com/.
- Eliminate secondhand smoke. Visit www.cdc.gov/tobacco/ETS_Toolkit/worksites/intro.htm.
- Learn more about indoor air quality in the workplace. Visit www.epa.gov/iaq/is-build2.html
- Eliminate environmental triggers at the workplace. Visit www.epa.gov/asthma/triggers.html.

Arthritis

- Share information and resources on arthritis management. See the Arthritis Foundation for more information at www.arthritis.org.
- Make accommodations available for those with arthritis (as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act).
- Invest in ergonomic furniture and equipment.

Focus Areas For High-Risk Employees

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Develop an emergency response plan...

Employees should know what to do when a co-worker has a medical emergency. All worksites should have a formal, defined, and written emergency response plan (ERP) for each location and should communicate it to all employees. A defined and written ERP, including formal employee training, will not only benefit high-risk individuals within the worksite, but potentially those who are not at risk, should an event occur.

A worksite's training and preparation can significantly improve outcomes if the right questions and concerns have been addressed beforehand and employees are ready to respond. Among others, here are some appropriate questions that should be addressed within an ERP:

- *Are automated external defibrillators (AEDs) readily available if someone suffers a heart attack? Have employees been trained how to use them? If not, have any employees been trained to administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or other life-saving measures?*
- *Are first aid kits accessible throughout the worksite's facilities? Do employees know what the kits contain and how to use the contents?*
- *Do employees know the appropriate medical emergency response numbers to call in case of emergency (9-1-1 or another specific number if that is not available)? Is the number prominently posted throughout the worksite?*
- *Have staff assignments been made that specify who manages the use of AEDs and/or first aid kits, who calls for medical assistance, and who is positioned in the most appropriate place to direct emergency responders upon arrival?*
- *Have employees been identified to serve as "emergency captains" to coordinate evacuations? Have employees who require additional assistance in case of evacuation been identified, and is support in place to give them additional time to exit?*
- *Do employees know how to recognize and respond appropriately to an individual experiencing an asthma attack or severe drop in blood glucose? Do employees know where medications are kept and how to administer them?*

The American Heart Association supports implementing the "chain of survival" to rescue people who suffer a cardiac arrest in the community. The adult chain consists of early recognition of the emergency and activation of emergency response system (phone 9-1-1 immediately), early CPR, early defibrillation, and early advanced care.

Focus Areas For High-Risk Employees

Emergency Response for High-Risk Individuals

Part of an emergency response plan (ERP) should include preparations for assisting and accommodating high-risk individuals during overall emergencies at the worksite. It is important to note that this applies to both medical emergencies and non-medical emergencies. While information about an individual's health risk should not be common knowledge unless the individual has specifically shared it with others, worksites should be prepared to address specific concerns with high-risk individuals and integrate appropriate actions into their ERP if requested or needed.

Part of the ERP should also address how to react should an employee experience an "event" such as a heart attack or stroke. While employees may not be aware of the health risk levels of their co-workers, they should still be prepared to implement pre-defined strategies for emergencies if the need arises.

The Importance of the Automatic External Defibrillator (AED)

More than 250,000 sudden cardiac deaths occur each year – among persons who may or may not have a previous diagnosis of heart disease. And unfortunately, CPR alone cannot fully restore blood flow nor restore heart rhythm. Only electric shock can do that – and prompt electric shock treatment can mean the difference between life and death for an employee who experiences abrupt and sudden loss of heart function. According to the American Heart Association, a person suffering cardiac arrest literally has minutes to live, and responding with an Automatic External Defibrillator – or AED – within those minutes can mean the difference between life and death! In fact, it has been documented that an AEDs in the hands of a properly trained operator can save 50,000 of the 250,000 lives lost annually to sudden cardiac death events,[29] many of which occur in the workplace.

An AED is a portable electronic device that automatically diagnoses a potentially life-threatening cardiac arrhythmia, or heart attack, and applies electrical shock to stop the arrhythmia and allow the heart to start beating normally again. About the size and weight of a small laptop computer, AEDs do not require much maintenance. They are easy to use with simple audio and/or visual prompts – although training is recommended – and are pre-programmed to administer shock only when necessary. AEDs are also very affordable at about $1500 to $2000 per unit and are rapidly becoming a staple in public facilities throughout the country.

The AED

Purpose: Quickly and effectively restore heartbeat and blood flow.

Who: Non-medical and minimally trained personnel.

Why: CPR alone cannot fully restore blood flow and does not restore heart rhythm.

Where: Onsite (office, warehouse, retail operation, camp, daycare facility, etc.)

How: Small portable automated external defibrillator units.

When: Immediately following sudden cardiac arrest.

SECTION FIVE RESOURCES

American Heart Association - www.americanheart.org
American Cancer Society - www.cancer.org
Arthritis Foundation - www.arthritis.org
American Diabetes Association - www.diabetes.org

Barnett E, Anderson T, Blosnich J, Menard J, Halverson J, Casper M. Heart Healthy and Stroke Free: A Social Environment Handbook. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2007. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/seh_handbook.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Making a Difference-The Business Community Takes on Diabetes. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1999.
Available at: http://www.ndep.nih.gov/diabetes/pubs/MakingDifference.pdf

Diabetes General Assessment Tool for Businesses. Available at: http://www.diabetesatwork.org/diabetesatwork/GettingStarted/AssessmentTool_General.cfm

Notes