

Inside Business Magazine

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Health coalition to start a diabetes program

The Virginia Business Coalition on Health received a Diabetes Seed Grant Award from the National Business Coalition on Health earlier this month to implement a diabetes management program called HealthMapRx. Chesapeake will be the first in the state to launch the program.

VBCH is rolling out the program with a few select employers in the region, starting with Chesapeake Public Schools. The target launch date for the program is July.

The program engages pharmacists and nutritionists to coach patients into compliance with a physician's recommendations. Participants in the program receive incentives for involvement, including reduced co-payments and free medications.

Eileen Ciccotelli is vice president at VBCH and project leader for HealthMapRx.

"It's like a turnkey product companies can purchase," Ciccotelli said. "All of the administration and the coaching are already developed."

The program is available only to members of the coalition.

HealthMapRx is a trademarked program of the American Pharmacists Association Foundation and is modeled after a successful program called the Asheville Project.

Employers on average will invest \$2,553 annually per person in the program for the first year, which includes waived co-payments and other incentives, medication adherence, laboratory costs, diabetes supplies, education sessions, coaching by a pharmacist and administrative fees. But depending on the number of participants in a certain region, that price could drop.

Ciccotelli said costs typically decrease by 15 percent in year two and another 4 percent in year three. However, annual savings in reduced hospitalizations per employee enrolled in the program is estimated around \$3,400, she said.

That tends to be the incentive on the employer's end.

"They've determined that they can either pay now or pay later," Ciccotelli said. "If they invest now and engage employees, health care costs could decrease."

Victoria Lucente is the assistant superintendent of budget and finance for Chesapeake Public Schools. She said the school system decided to budget for HealthMapRx as part of its wellness initiatives.

“We need to do a paradigm shift on health insurance,” Lucente said. “We saw this as a product that we could use to invest in wellness rather than pay for sickness.”

Diabetes is a difficult disease to manage, Lucente said, and can affect employees both personally and professionally with attendance issues and performance.

Lucente said the school system’s health provider estimates around 850 people on the school system’s health insurance plan have diabetes. That figure includes employees, retirees and dependents.

Approximately 3,400 plan participants have diabetes, high cholesterol, and hypertension or are obese, Lucente said.

“You don’t have to be an employee to get involved, you just have to be on the plan,” Lucente said. “It’s like a buddy system.”

The school system recently launched a wellness program and has a committee to oversee various initiatives. They’ve implemented walking and weight loss programs and plan to launch a smoking cessation program in the spring.

There is one thing threatening the school system’s implementation of the program " money. Lucente said the money has been budgeted, but could be in danger of cuts.

“I’m hoping it makes it all the way through because of the benefits,” Lucente said. “We’re going to give it a year to see if it’s successful. Others have seen results in six to nine months.”

The seed grants from the national coalition are funded by pharmaceutical companies, including Novo Nordisk, Sanofi-Aventis, Pfizer and Merck.

The VBCH is based in Virginia Beach and was founded in 1983 under the name Hampton Roads Health Coalition.

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For more information about the Virginia Business Coalition on Health, contact them at 757.552.0913 or visit their website at www.myVBCH.org.