

# County of San Mateo

## Workplace Wellness Policy

### A. Purpose

County of San Mateo values the health and wellbeing of its employees. Supporting an employee's whole person needs is necessary to provide the highest quality services to the community. Employee wellbeing also bolsters workplace engagement.

The County's mission to "enhance the wellbeing of children, adults, and families by providing professional, responsive, caring, and supportive service" starts with a cared for, supported, and well workforce. The County's vision for "all San Mateo County residents to enjoy a healthy, safe, prosperous, and collaborative community" is only possible when employees serving the community are also safe, healthy, and collaborative.

Healthy employees may require less expensive medical and pharmacy treatments, may have reduced burden from chronic health conditions, and are better able to be present and focused on work.

County of San Mateo's ability to attract and retain a talented and remarkable workforce depends on the balanced work life and health of its employees.

A Workplace Wellness Policy (WWP) promotes better employee health by: 1. establishing a Countywide Culture of Wellbeing that includes a) a sense of belonging, b) equitable access, and c) multi-cultural perspectives, 2. creating infrastructure in Departments to support ongoing wellbeing efforts, 3. modifying certain workplace processes, conditions, and environmental factors to support wellness efforts, 4. decreasing barriers to access of certain preventive healthcare services by collaborating with insurance carriers and providing select Wellness Activities at low or no cost, and 5. protecting time to schedule and engage in such activities.

Empowering, educating, and coaching individuals are notable strengths of the County's Wellness Program. However, the County also understands that health and wellbeing are influenced by factors outside of individual behavior, including the conditions in which people live, work, learn and play. These conditions are known as the social determinants of health.

Using a public health framework, employee wellness policies can support and emphasize relationships, environment, community, and resource flow, as well as individual health behaviors and medical care.

## B. Background

The Board of Supervisors adopted a Workplace Wellness Policy (WWP) in 2009, emphasizing a safe work environment and work practices, healthy nutrition choices in vending machines, break rooms, kitchens, and catered events, opportunities for physical activity, regular health education classes, smoking cessation programs, and recreation events. The organizational commitments included a Wellness Policy, a Wellness Committee, and a Countywide Employee Wellness Program.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted a need for expansion from a physical health focus to a Whole Person approach. Public sector employees were not exempt from national trends of increasing burnout, alcohol and substance abuse, mental health disorders, and other chronic conditions as a result of stress before and during the pandemic. Whole Person Health incorporates physical *and* mental wellbeing resources, including emotional support and social connection.

## C. Scope and Eligibility

This policy applies to all County employees.

The role of the WWP is to create and reinforce opportunities and conditions for employees to be healthy at work and at home. This is done by embedding elements into work operations.

Supporting employee wellness is the responsibility of everyone across the organization. In addition to being an individual responsibility, it requires the cooperation and effort from everyone who contributes to the creation of wellness opportunities -- which includes employees, supervisors, managers, and executives. Wellness is as important for a department to support as any other operational process.

### Use of County Time to Participate in the Employee Wellness Program

If all or part of a program is conducted during the employee's normal work schedule, the employee may attend County-sponsored programs on County time consistent with departmental policies and after obtaining their supervisor's approval.

Each County employee will be eligible to participate in 1 hour per month of voluntary Wellness Activities on paid time during their normal work hours. Voluntary wellness activities outside of an employee's normal work schedule do not occur on paid time. The County highly encourages managers/supervisors to approve Wellness Activity requests whenever consistent with business operations.

All employee participation in the Wellness Program and Wellness Activities is purely voluntary, and not required as a condition of employment.

Wellness Activities that are integrated as part of the workday reduce barriers for employees whose commutes, family care, work schedules, community obligations, and other responsibilities leave less opportunity to engage in wellness activities outside of the workday.

## D. Wellness Policy Focus Areas

This policy encourages Department Heads and Leadership from each Department to promote and utilize the Wellness Program. Best practices include collaborating with the Wellness Committee, promoting access to and participation in the Employee Wellness Program, and creating Department-specific wellbeing efforts based on work type, workload, work units, work site, and recent events contributing to changing employee wellbeing needs.

The WWP recognizes five key areas:

1. Organizational Commitment
2. Physical Wellbeing
3. Mental Wellbeing
4. Social Wellbeing
5. Leadership Support & Responsibilities

### **1. Organizational Commitment**

The County has established and supports the continuation of a Countywide Employee Wellness Program, a Wellness Committee, and a Worksite Wellness Policy. The County commits to annually assess employee wellbeing needs, industry best practices, and Wellness Program effectiveness.

The County will continue to set an example for other organizations by creating a supportive work environment, organizational practices, and Culture of Wellbeing.

Departments are encouraged to have representation in the Countywide Wellness Committee and create internal subcommittees to guide wellbeing efforts and oversee implementation of Wellness Activities at the department level. Wellness Champions are the representation for each department in the Countywide Wellness Committee.

Champion duties include but are not limited to: time to serve on the Wellness Committee, time to develop/run an internal departmental wellness subcommittee, as well as direct and regular access to the Director and/or Senior Leadership and/or an Executive Sponsor. Recruitment and selection should keep the above in mind. This may require staffing changes. The recommended time allowance is 4 hours per month.

The Countywide Employee Wellness Program is available to support the subcommittees and departments in their efforts.

### County Buildings

Each worksite is strongly encouraged to consider the following modifications to existing County buildings to the extent such modifications are practical and consistent with the County's operational, financial, and other needs:

- a. Physical Activity - Make stairwells more inviting to use (e.g., bright paint, signage); make walking paths more and inviting; appropriately equip and conveniently situate employee break spaces; develop and post signage to promote walking routes on County property and around County buildings.
- b. Lactation & Wellness Rooms – Continue to identify and appropriately equip dedicated or co-located lactation rooms for all County worksites; To the extent the County plans to renovate or improve existing County facilities, the County is strongly encouraged to consider incorporating a dedicated space for a wellness room or fitness center along with showers and lockers for the employees who are actively working out. Refer to the Wellness Rooms document for guidance on creating supportive environments for employees in existing or new buildings.

## **2. Physical Wellbeing**

Employees are encouraged to engage in Wellness Activities that may help delay the onset of certain chronic health conditions. Physical activity will be offered regularly for all fitness levels and physical abilities to allow interested employees to work toward physical fitness.

Walking paths, staircases, onsite gyms, and exercise classes will be identified and promoted at each County site (as applicable) and virtually.

In addition to the health benefits they may receive, employees will have access to nurses, health coaches, dietitians, and preventive health resources that support employees throughout the health continuum through the Countywide Employee Wellness Program.

Healthy eating choices will be available in vending machines, and when County paid food is provided in break rooms, kitchens, meetings, and social events (see Nutrition Standards).

Smoking cessation resources and substance and alcohol abuse resources will be available through the Employee Wellness Program and in the wellness portal.

The County encourages managers to schedule stretch breaks for all meetings that are at least 1 hour long, physically active work breaks, and walking and/or standing meetings when/where appropriate for all staff to participate. Managers are also encouraged to approve employee requests to attend live exercise classes or watch recorded exercise videos.

### **3. Mental Wellbeing (emotional, cognitive, psychological, social)**

Mental wellbeing of employees is influenced by several factors, including opportunities and environmental conditions of the worksite as well as employees' personal situations and communities outside of work. Worksite conditions are easier to modify than those of the community. It is important we build out opportunities at the workplace to improve mental wellbeing.

Organizational best practices include: improving access to peer support, spreading reflective supervision practices, changing day to day work practices, incorporating movement into workflows, making environments more neuro-regulating, using facility animals, adding Wellness Activities into regular meeting agendas, increasing appropriate use of Critical Incident Response, contextualizing self-care in relation to environmental conditions, optimizing use of existing mental wellbeing benefits, reducing stigma, and more optimally matching EAP services to employee needs.

All County employees can help normalize mental wellbeing care by modeling decisions and choices that include and prioritize mental health, validating mental health challenges, and regularly protecting, promoting, and supporting use of mental wellbeing classes and services, especially after a stressful event (e.g. through the employee wellness portal, EAP, or health plans). Supervisors and Managers can also model inclusive leadership that helps people from all backgrounds feel safer being authentic and expressing their feelings.

Improving mental wellbeing at the individual level may be accomplished by means of mental training and other skills, which can also be embedded into work practices alongside the improvement of opportunities and environmental conditions.

Employees are encouraged to engage in Wellness Activities that reduce stress, promote relaxation, increase resilience, and help employees identify and regulate emotions.

Mindfulness and meditation classes will be offered regularly.

The employee wellness portal will house videos and resources to improve emotional wellbeing, communication, and mood.

EAP counseling will be available to all employees and promoted through the Employee Wellness Program. EAP workshops on topics relevant to staff needs and challenges will be offered regularly.

In alignment with destigmatizing conversations around mental health and wellbeing needs, the Employee Wellness Program operates within a new Privacy Policy that protects the content of employee contact with the Wellness Team.

#### **4. Social Wellbeing**

Social wellbeing is related to having meaningful, supportive, and connective relationships. While everyone has differing social needs throughout the lifespan, having healthy relationships is integral to health and wellbeing.

Employees are encouraged to attend recreation events, Signature Initiative events, wellness workshops/retreats, and other opportunities for social connection and team building. Manager or Wellness Committee-led social connection activities are encouraged in larger/longer meetings, and throughout the work year.

Managers and Supervisors should communicate the importance of teamwork, encourage regular communication and connection between teams, and celebrate non-work-related connections, such as community work/volunteering/etc.

When voluntary, social, non-work connections happen outside of working hours, managers and supervisors should be respectful of employee's non-work obligations and responsibilities when encouraging such participation.

#### **5. Leadership Support & Responsibilities**

The County strongly encourages Executives, Managers, and Supervisors to utilize and collaborate with the Wellness Committee and support Wellness Champions with the time and space necessary to plan Workplace Wellness Activities.

- Wellness Champions are to develop strategies with key stakeholders to enable employee participation in Workplace Wellness Activities, tailored to align with the business needs and priorities of each department.
- Departments may structure their own wellness programs and resources and develop related internal structures within the general framework of this document.
- Supervisors are to be proactive in offering eligible employees the opportunity to make use of scheduling flexibilities for participation in Workplace Wellness Activities.
- Supervisors and employees should collaborate to request and approve requested Wellness Activities (up to 1 hour per month paid time) consistent with the business and operational needs of the department.
- Consideration of employee requests shall be determined without arbitrary barriers or limitations.

- Wellness Champions should be allotted up to one hour per week (or 4 hours per month) for planning and execution of Workplace Wellness Activities, departmental events, and Signature Initiative events.

### **Role of the Manager/Supervisor:**

“Managers have just as much of an impact on people’s mental health as their spouse — and even more of an impact than their doctor or therapist.” – Workforce Institute at UKG

The County highly encourages the use of Reflective Supervision when managers or supervisors conduct 1-on-1's with their direct reports. According to research by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Reflective Supervision is based on the following attitudes:

- Staff deserve the support and respect we are asking them to give our clients
- Staff are our partners with a critical role in achieving outcomes
- Staff have expertise about their own fields of practice
- Staff’s contributions are valuable and important

### **Role of Executive Leadership:**

County of San Mateo strongly encourages leaders to measure wellbeing efforts and assess departmental infrastructure that supports employee physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

Leadership should regularly partner with Wellness on understanding employee wellbeing needs, creating strategies, and measuring success.

Leadership should collaborate with the Wellness Committee to make managers, supervisors, and employees aware of this policy, implement elements, and review annually.

## **E. Definitions**

1. **Conditions:** environmental/ecological factors and opportunities that affect the worksite
2. **Culture of Wellbeing:** a spectrum of beliefs, practices, and environmental conditions in which good health and wellbeing are shared values.
3. **Flexibilities:** A broad range of strategies, including flexible scheduling, etc., aimed to meet the business needs of the County and support the individual needs of employees, with mutually beneficial, agreed-upon arrangements for when, where, and how employees complete their work.
4. **Mental Training:** various skill sets which can be learned and cultivated over time to improve mental wellbeing elements such as increased positive emotions, life

satisfaction, flourishing, sense of meaning and purpose, hope, and ability to pursue self-defined goals.

5. **Mental Wellbeing:** a term that includes emotional, cognitive, psychological, and social wellbeing, and affects how people think, feel, behave, and relate.
6. **Neuro-regulation:** a complex physiological process within the human nervous system (brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves), largely occurring automatically in response to environmental factors, but also partially influenceable by conscious changes, which aims to improve or adapt the functionality of the nervous system to assist the individual with its current experience (i.e., what is happening in one's life).
7. **Wellbeing:** (as adapted from the World Health Organization) A positive and fluid state, experienced by individuals and groups, which is influenced by work, community, and other social/environmental conditions.
8. **Wellness:** The active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that on a continuum lead towards whole person health.
9. **Wellness v Wellbeing distinction:** These terms for the purposes of the County are overlapping, multidimensional, evolving, experiential, and personal, subject to historical and cultural differences and contexts. The County generally distinguishes the usage of wellbeing as an overall fluid state, and wellness as the pursuit of active processes and skills by an individual, both of which change over time in response to opportunities in the environment.
10. **Whole Person Health:** the maintenance of health across the lifespan that takes into account physical, emotional, social, financial, and spiritual aspects of an individual as well as relationships with their family and community. Whole Person Health looks beyond a diagnosis and/or symptoms to better understand all factors that contribute to absence of disease and reaching full human potential.
11. **Workplace Wellness Activities:** activities that include a range of formally organized events (such as classes, lectures, demonstrations, workshops, etc.) and individual/self-generated actions that support wellness throughout the workday. One way that Wellness Activities may be accessed is through the Wellness Portal.
  - a. Examples offered through the Wellness Portal may include, but are not limited to, nutrition classes, preventive screenings, EAP classes, exercise instruction and practice, tobacco cessation resources, walking and/or stairs breaks, Health Coach calls, mindfulness/meditation classes, Mental Health First Aid, Wellness Room utilization, on-site gym utilization, Wellness Nurse calls, Babies & You Program and lactation resources, employee socials, health education classes, Wellness Fair sessions, Wellness Dividend activities, Departmental Signature Initiative activities, stress management



techniques, Registered Dietician consultations, use of emotional wellbeing apps, access to employee wellness portal.

12. **Workplace Wellness Policy (WWP):** a framework of basic principles and workplace health strategies that promote a healthy and engaged workforce.

*Adapted from NIH WWP, The U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Wellbeing, and HHS Workplace Flexibilities*

## F. Workplace Wellness Resources

1. [Employee Wellness SharePoint](#)
2. [Employee Wellness Portal](#)
3. [Employee Wellness Program Overview](#)
4. [Quarterly Wellness Digest](#)
5. [EAP Resources](#)
6. [Employee Wellness Yammer Page](#)
7. [Contacting the Employee Wellness Team](#)
8. [Reflective Supervision Practices](#)
9. [SDOH](#)
10. [Social Ecological Model](#)
11. [Privacy Policy](#)
12. [Wellness Rooms](#)
13. [Nutrition Standards](#)
14. [Annual Wellness Fair](#)