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Contact: Alison McLaurin
HWTF
(919) 733-4009 (w)
(919) 649-8002 (c)

Mark Stinneford
BCBSNC
(919) 765-3005 (w)
(919) 906-7934 (c)

N.C.'s Obesity Prevention Initiative Unveils New Workplace Wellness Campaign

*New Web site and TV spot links North Carolinians to Tools for
Healthier Weight and Lifestyle – at the Office*

RALEIGH, N.C. – Fit Together, an initiative sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) and the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) to combat obesity and overweight issues facing North Carolinians, today launched the state's first comprehensive workplace wellness campaign, Fit Workplace.

Fit Workplace will encourage business leaders and human resource managers to embrace workplace wellness programs for their companies. The Fit Workplace campaign includes a TV spot that is airing statewide now through mid-November, and N.C. specific, web-based tools and resources that employers can use to gauge the health of their employees and implement programs related to preventive health care, nutrition, stress reduction, physical activity and more. The Fit Together Web site also offers dozens of case studies of local companies that have successfully implemented workplace wellness programs, often at little or no cost to the company or their employees.

“Obesity is estimated to cost North Carolina taxpayers more than \$2 billion annually in preventable health care costs,” said Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue, chair of HWTF. “Obesity prevention at the workplace requires a commitment from both employees and employers. I believe that Fit Together’s Web site will empower human resource managers across North Carolina to learn from each other, by sharing success stories and lessons learned, so that we can all get Fit Together — at work.”

BCBSNC’s CEO Bob Greczyn agrees, adding that workplace wellness is part of Fit Together’s overall strategy to combat obesity in North Carolina.

“Increased health care costs and diseases related to obesity and other preventable health issues threaten the economic vitality of our state and our quality of life,” said Greczyn. “Employers are bearing the brunt of these negative trends, and the good news is that they can make a real difference. Fit Workplace gives them practical tools that they can start using today to promote a healthier workforce and a healthier North Carolina.”

Fit Workplace was launched today in a webcast featuring Lt. Gov. Perdue; Dr. Don Bradley, executive medical director of BCBSNC; and Meka Sales, obesity program officer for the HWTF.

The current Fit Workplace TV spot is available at www.fittogethernc.org.

Among the company success stories being highlighted by Fit Workplace are:

- In the Triad: At Greensboro-based Replacements, Ltd., the world's largest selection of old and new dinnerware, at least half of the 545 employees take part in fitness and wellness programs. Since instituting the program, Replacements Ltd. has seen a reduction in workers' compensation insurance rates for two consecutive years.

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- In the West: At Blue Ridge Paper Products, Inc. in Asheville, an onsite health clinic has saved the company more than \$500,000 in one year.
- In the East: The City of Elizabeth City's employees participate in a challenge to walk 100 miles in 100 days.

At <http://www.fittogethernc.org/WorkplaceWellness.aspx>, a "Workplace Wellness Toolkit" provides comprehensive information that human resource managers and employees can use to implement effective health and wellness programs at the workplace:

- The "N.C. Workplace Programs" provides detailed information on what other North Carolina companies are doing to encourage workplace wellness - it can be searched by business type, number of employees and several types of program options.
- The "Workplace Health Gauge" offers a company-specific health risk assessment that can help identify wellness policy strengths and weaknesses, and make personalized recommendations on how to improve it.
- The "Steps to an Effective Program" provides a step-by-step plan on how to make workplace wellness a reality for your organization.
- The "Quick Wellness Program Ideas" link offers quick and affordable ideas to get you started.

According to the Research Triangle Institute's 2004 obesity study, North Carolina taxpayers pay an estimated \$2.1 billion annually for obesity-related medical expenses. North Carolina Prevention Partners also reported in 2004 that each year health-related problems cost North Carolina businesses nearly \$5,000 per employee. These problems can lead to chronic disease, resulting in absenteeism and escalating health care costs for employers.

Obesity has emerged as a major threat to children and adults across the United States, especially here in North Carolina. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 61 percent of North Carolina adults are overweight or obese, and 25 percent reported no exercise in the prior 30 days. Fit Together's mission is to support programs and initiatives that address this growing problem.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina is a leader in delivering innovative health care products, services and information to nearly 3.4 million members, including approximately 744,000 served on behalf of other Blue Plans. For 73 years, the company has served its customers by offering health insurance at a competitive price and has served the people of North Carolina through support of community organizations, programs and events that promote good health. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Access BCBSNC online at www.bcbsnc.com.

About NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program for seniors. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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