NIH Policy Manual

1481 - NIH Workplace Wellness Policy

Issuing Office: OD/OM/ORS/PES/DATS **Phone:** (301) 402-8180

Release Date: 7/24/2017 ? **Technical Revision Date:** 6/07/2018 ?

Transmittal Notice

1. **Explanation of Material Transmitted:** This chapter describes the purpose and scope of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Workplace Wellness Policy (WWP) for employees, supervisors, and NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs).
2. **Filing Instructions:**

   Remove: N/A
   Insert: NIH Manual Chapter 1481, dated 07/24/2017

PLEASE NOTE: For information on:

- Content of this chapter: Contact the issuing office listed above.
- NIH Policy Manual: Contact the Division of Management Support, OMA, at 301-496-4606, or go to https://oma.od.nih.gov/DMS/Pages/Manual-Chapters.aspx.
- Scheduling Flexibilities: Contact OD/OM/OHR/Workforce Relations Division at 301-402-9203.
- NIH Workplace Wellness Activities: Contact OD/ORS/PES/DATS/Wellness Program at 301-402-8180.

A. Purpose

This chapter outlines the scope and objectives of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Workplace Wellness Policy (WWP), and details the procedures for employees, supervisors, and Institutes and Centers (ICs).

The NIH believes it is in the best interests of the agency mission to support workplace well-being, and, as such, establishes the Workplace Wellness Policy (WWP) described herein. The WWP aims to take the agency's own best advice by empowering employees to take action to improve their overall well-being. Specifically, the policy seeks to assist those who are interested in maximizing their job productivity and health through participation in Workplace Wellness Activities.

B. Scope and Eligibility

This policy applies to all full- or part-time federal employees[1] of NIH. Employee utilization of scheduling flexibilities to participate in Workplace Wellness Activities is:

- contingent upon supervisory consideration and approval based on employee eligibility, and on meeting both the business needs of the agency and the individual needs of employees;
- not mandatory; and
- not an employee entitlement.

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[1] The NIH will continue to honor all current Collective Bargaining Agreements and will implement this policy consistent with the Agreements and its obligations under law, rule or regulation.

C. Background

For the past three decades, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has released science-based, 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans called *Healthy People*. One of its leading goals is the attainment of high-quality and longer lives free of preventable disease, disability, injury, and premature death in people of all ages. In recognition of the challenge mentioned above, HHS established an objective in *Healthy People 2020* that calls for an increase in the proportion of worksites offering employee health promotion programs.

Smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity are a few of the most important factors associated with morbidity and mortality in the United States, as indicated in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. These guidelines describe evidence-based dietary and/or physical activity recommendations to promote health and reduce chronic disease risk. However, despite a strong body of evidence that show many chronic diseases can be prevented by the adoption of healthful lifestyle behaviors, many employees find the maintenance of individual health behaviors to be a challenge with competing demands of the workday, long commutes, family responsibilities, and community obligations.

As NIH seeks to ensure its ability to attract and retain a talented and productive workforce, and thereby deliver an exceptional return on investment to the American public, agency leadership recognizes optimally effective organizations depend upon the balanced work life and health of its employees and encourages them to engage in workplace wellness activities as defined above.

The NIH WWP provides guidance to supervisors and employees on the use of scheduling flexibilities, including, but not limited to, already existing flexibilities, as a means of

participation in Workplace Wellness Activities.

Providing employees with greater flexibility and encouragement to participate in such activities will assist NIH in promoting a workforce engaged and empowered to deliver exceptional service, and, at the same time, enable them to optimize their health.

D. Definitions

1. **NIH Workplace Wellness Policy –** NIH adopted a set of basic principles to promote a healthy and productive workforce through employee use of scheduling flexibilities to facilitate their participation in Workplace Wellness Activities, as defined below.
2. **Workplace Wellness Activities –** These Activities include a range of both formally organized events (such as classes, lectures, demonstrations, interactive workshops, etc.) and individual/self-generated actions that support wellness throughout the workday. Examples may include, but are not limited to, nutrition seminars, education about preventive screenings, consultations with the NIH Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or NIH Dependent Care Resource and Referral Service, exercise instruction and practice, assistance through tobacco cessation resources, walking and/or stairs breaks, participation in safety/health/wellness forums, etc. For an overview and specifics about the organized and individual Workplace Wellness Activities, please visit the Wellness@NIH web site at http://wellnessatnih.nih.gov/ (NIH-access only).

1. **NIH Scheduling Flexibilities -** Strategies aimed to meet the business needs of the Agency, as well as the individual needs of employees, with mutually beneficial, agreed-upon arrangements for when, where, and how employees complete their work. Examples of existing flexibilities can be found at https://hr.nih.gov/working-nih/work-schedules

1. **Federal Employee -** An individual who holds an appointment at the NIH under Title 5 United States Code (U.S.C) or Title 42 U.S.C., to include members of the Senior Executive Service and the Senior Biomedical Research Service. This does not include Commissioned Corps Officers, contractors, guest researchers, volunteers, or special volunteers.

E. Policy

This policy is authorized under 5 U.S.C. 7901(c)(4), wherein the head of each U.S. federal agency may establish, within the appropriation limits available, programs "to promote and maintain the physical and mental fitness of employees," including "preventive programs relating to health." The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Employee Health Services Handbook also references this authority and related health promotion and prevention program areas.

This policy is further supported by:

- Presidential Memorandum, issued on June 23, 2014, titled "Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs", wherein agencies are encouraged to increase the availability and use of worksite health and wellness programs, and opportunities to utilize those resources, to the maximum extent practicable; and
- Executive Order 13266, issued on June 20, 2002, titled "Activities to Promote Personal Fitness", authorizing federal agencies to expand opportunities for individuals to empower themselves to improve their general health.

F. Responsibilities

NIH leadership strongly encourages:

1. ICs to develop strategies consistent with NIH policies and the goal of enabling employee participation in Workplace Wellness Activities. NIH ICs may structure their own wellness programs and develop related internal wellness policies within the general framework of this document;
2. Supervisors to be proactive in offering eligible employees the opportunity through an arrangement, either annually or for another agreed upon time frame, to make use of scheduling flexibilities for participation in Workplace Wellness Activities, as long as it does not impede satisfactory completion of job tasks or office coverage;
3. Employees to proactively make such requests when interested;
4. Supervisors and employees to communicate and collaborate to:

    a. understand the nature and need for requested flexibilities; and
    b. consider employee requests based on meeting both the business needs of the agency and the individual needs of employees. Consideration of employee requests shall be determined without arbitrary barriers or limitations.

In addition, NIH leadership requires that:

1. ICs make their supervisors and employees aware of this policy annually in whatever way(s) are most effective for its implementation.

    Note: Because each IC is represented on the NIH Health and Wellness Council, and the IC Director appoints that representative, the Council representative for each IC may be a contact and/or coordinator to assist in communicating this policy to its workforce.

G. References

1. 5 U.S.C. § 7901 – Health Service Programs
2. Presidential Memorandum – Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs, Issued by the White House, Office of the Secretary, June 23, 2014
3. HHS Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2008
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture and HHS Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010, 7th Edition

5. HHS Healthy People 2020 – Worksite Promotion Objective (ECBP-8)
6. U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Employee Health Services Handbook
7. Executive Order 13266, "Activities to Promote Personal Fitness," June 20, 2002
8. United States Surgeon General's National Prevention Plan, June 2011
9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Federal Workplace Health Collaborative. Federal Wellness Resource Guide
10. NIH Manual Chapter 2300-610-4, "Alternative Work Schedules"
11. OPM Memorandum, 2014 WellCheck Results and OPM recommendations for Federal worksite health and wellness programs, July 16, 2015
12. OPM Memorandum, "Handbook on Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs for Elder Care," July 13, 2015

H. Procedures

1. Employees must follow existing procedures and meet eligibility requirements as identified in the NIH Manual Chapter 2300-610-4, *Alternative Work Schedules*, and any other applicable federal, NIH, or IC policies before requesting scheduling flexibilities to participate in Workplace Wellness Activities.
2. The criteria for supervisors to consider employee requests shall be based on meeting both the business needs of the agency and the individual needs of employees, in a way that the employee's work meets the established level of performance and timeliness. Consideration of employee requests shall be made without arbitrary barriers or limitations.
3. Once an employee requests an arrangement to participate in Workplace Wellness Activities, the supervisor is expected to reach a decision and communicate it to the employee in a timeframe not to exceed 20 business days, in accordance with the June 2014 Presidential Memorandum – Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs.
4. After an employee request is approved, his or her arrangement may later be revised if circumstances change, including changes in business needs and/or changes in an individual's needs. The supervisor and employee shall address such changes together. In addition, an approval may be revoked if an employee is not meeting work responsibilities.
5. If a supervisor denies an initial request or revokes a previously approved request, the denial or revocation must be based on business-related and/or employee eligibility reasons.

I. Workplace Wellness Resources

1. Office of Research Services (ORS)
    a. ORS/Division of Amenities & Transportation (DATS)/Wellness
2. NIH Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
3. Recreation and Welfare Association (R&W)

    a. Fitness Programs

4. Office of Human Resources (OHR)

    a. Work Schedule Information

5. Wellness@NIH web site at http://wellnessatnih.nih.gov/ (NIH-access only)

J. Records Retention and Disposal

All records pertaining to this chapter must be retained and disposed of under the authority of NIH Manual 1743, "Keeping and Destroying Records," Appendix 1, "NIH Records Control Schedules" (as amended). These records must be maintained in accordance with current NIH Records Management and Federal Guidelines. Contact your IC Records Liaison or the NIH Records Officer for additional information.

K. Internal Controls

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance to NIH personnel for participation in the NIH WWP through the use of NIH scheduling flexibilities.

1. **Office Responsible for Reviewing Internal Controls Relative to this Chapter:** Office of Research Services.

    ORS will:

    - send out email reminders concerning the NIH Workplace Wellness Policy;
    - work with the Office of Human Resources (OHR) to include annual reminders in HR news bulletins;
    - work with OHR to orient prospective employees and supervisors to the policy; and
    - respond and track questions or issues sent to orsinfo@ors.od.nih.gov.

1. **Frequency of Review:** Ongoing.
2. **Method of Review:** Tracking of Activities Listing in K-1.
3. **Review Reports are sent to:** Director, ORS.