



UChicago Medicine

Invests in Employee Health Through Diabetes Prevention During COVID-19

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

The University of Chicago Medicine is a nonprofit, academic health system based on the campus of the University of Chicago that provides patient care, research, and medical education. UChicago Medicine is one of Illinois's large employers, with an operating revenue of \$2.19 billion and more than 9,400 employees, including approximately 2,500 nurses and 980 residents and fellows. Uniting the Pritzker School of Medicine, Biological Sciences Division, University of Chicago Medical Center, Community Health and Hospital Division, and UChicago Medicine Physicians, UChicago Medicine has grown into an integrated academic and community health system since opening its first hospital in 1927.

DECIDING TO OFFER NATIONAL DPP

In July 2019, the Midwest Business Group on Health (MBGH), a health benefits influencer under contract with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and supported by the [Employer Learning Collaborative](#), provided technical assistance to UChicago Medicine and introduced them to the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP). UChicago Medicine considered the return on investment (ROI) that the National DPP lifestyle change program could bring.

“At the height of a pandemic, prestigious UChicago Medicine, with so many frontline workers, succeeded in raising employee health and preventing diabetes by conducting research, utilizing partners, and maximizing key resources to provide an outstanding, cost-saving National DPP pilot. Employees jumped in and said, ‘I need this now.’”

**Judy Hearn,
Midwest Business Group
on Health**



Working collaboratively with MBGH, UChicago Medicine built a concept summary that evolved over time. ROI calculators, available on the [National DPP Coverage Toolkit website](#), assisted in building the case for coverage. UChicago Medicine looked at its aggregated employee medical claims data and estimated how much would be spent if nothing were done, and the cost of employees developing type 2 diabetes versus the costs of a program to prevent diabetes.



288
PARTICIPANTS



ABOUT
\$205k
SAVINGS



1,791
POUNDS LOST



93%
SATISFIED

To gauge the employee population at risk, UChicago Medicine partnered with a platform vendor for biometric screenings and determined what percentages of employees would qualify and were likely to engage. Biometric screening was voluntary for employees, and approximately 38% of employees participated. Screening found approximately 900 employees and/or dependents over age 18 with prediabetes, yielding an estimated **\$3.4M** cost to the health plans. To determine eligibility criteria for National DPP lifestyle change program participation, UChicago Medicine further looked at its employee medical claims data.

Using information gathered, UChicago Medicine estimated a Year 1 National DPP lifestyle change program pilot project cost at \$65,000-\$75,000. Year 1 medical plan savings projections from the pilot program ranged from low \$142,000 (160 enrollments) to high \$205,000 (232 enrollments).

In February 2020, a fine-tuned concept was presented to Human Resources for approval and received a great deal of support. In March 2020, the concept team met with the President of The University

of Chicago Medical Center to review benefits and changes for annual enrollment. The President was fully on board and approved the endeavor.

SELECTING A VENDOR AND DELIVERY MODE

UChicago Medicine carefully weighed the option of providing the National DPP lifestyle change program themselves versus using a vendor. By October 2019, they began exploring different vendors and modes of delivery. This process took time and initially resulted in three different vendor options. Next, UChicago Medicine had to decide on which delivery mode to offer. Offering the National DPP lifestyle change program on-site and through in-person groups would be better for some participants, while an online, digital offering would allow for more flexible access. Opting for the remote option, UChicago Medicine secured demonstrations from three vendors.



As they interviewed vendors, UChicago Medicine also considered medical claims—the ability to offer the National DPP lifestyle change program as a covered medical benefit—to be incredibly important as a factor. UChicago Medicine ultimately decided on a vendor that had a direct contract with their preferred provider organization (PPO) provider and could bill the program as a medical claim. The existing direct contract and benefits coordination obviated the need for additional contracting and extensive security process reviews. In addition, the vendor selected provided a “best in class” digital solution for National DPP to accommodate a shift-oriented workforce.

UChicago began offering the National DPP lifestyle change program as a pilot in July 2020, temporarily limiting participation eligibility to its more than 5,000 PPO members, plus spouses and children over 18 years old. Exclusive provider organization (EPO) plans were excluded from the initial pilot as they did not have a direct contract with the National DPP vendor.

ENSURING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRAM COMPLETION

Two days prior to a full launch, UChicago Medicine sent out an employee memo to announce that the program was starting and that more detailed emails from the vendor would follow. Immediately, employees began inquiring how they could sign up.

As a thank-you gift, participants were given small UChicago Medicine promotional products when they completed the first nine lessons. Upon full completion of the program at one year, UChicago Medicine will provide each participant with a \$200 Amazon gift card. These added incentives are budgeted into program costs for long-term sustainability.

GENERATING RESULTS FOR A LIFETIME OF GOOD HEALTH

The National DPP lifestyle change program vendor estimated that 187 to 200 people would participate in the lifestyle change program. However, 406 people applied to the lifestyle change program pilot, and 309 (75.9%) were accepted following a brief, one-minute survey. Of the 309, the program enrolled 246 participants (79.5%), exceeding the vendor’s projected enrollment of 232 at initial deployment (benchmark of 79%).

“The lessons every week and the feeling of being accountable not only to yourself but your group. The 16-week period of continued communication and collaboration without feeling pushed/forced **made a difference for me.**”

**UChicago Medicine
National DPP
Participant**





The lifestyle change program has garnered a 93% satisfaction rating from participants, with a lesson completion rate of 83.5%, exceeding the vendor's benchmarks of 85% and 83%, respectively. Participants rated the free scale, lessons, and food tracking as top program features.

The vendor provides UChicago Medicine with a weekly enrollment and insights data file with demographical information and participation by week. UChicago Medicine receives a full report on engagement monthly. The vendor further provides projections based on continuing weight loss and adjusted diabetes risk reduction based on the population. For example, a loss of more than 10% of body weight may result in diabetes risk reduction of 85%. At the six-month mark, participants had lost a total of 600 pounds. By nine months, the participant population had lost more than 1,316 pounds.

MOVING BEYOND THE PILOT TOWARD FULL IMPLEMENTATION

UChicago Medicine has a strong culture of health and offers opportunities for employees to reduce medical premiums through participation in wellness activities such as a criteria-based program. They also have initiatives throughout the year, such as step challenges. As part of a wellness initiative, UChicago Medicine emphasizes the importance of self-care for employees. This is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many employees are caring for high acuity patients.





The lifestyle change program pilot has been so successful that UChicago Medicine is working through the logistics to expand program offerings to EPO plans as well with a target offering date of fall 2021. UChicago Medicine plans eventually to offer the lifestyle change program exclusively online to all employees and eligible family members.

“The National DPP lifestyle change program has been an important investment in growing our culture of health. In a short time, we have seen incredible results that exceeded our expectations even during a challenging year. Our employees are excited to grow relationships and build lifelong healthy habits.”

**Mandy Clay,
UChicago Medicine**



INSIDER TIPS & TAKEAWAYS

-  **Employer coalitions are valuable resources and assets.**
MBGH provided critical information on diabetes prevention and applying for Diabetes Prevention Grant funding. MBGH facilitated conversations between UChicago Medicine and IDPH. MBGH also provided vendor selection support and pilot grant funding. Later, MBGH offered opportunities for UChicago Medicine to present their National DPP lifestyle change program pilot project at MBGH-sponsored events.
-  **Assess all relevant data.**
UChicago Medicine looked carefully at employee health and cost data to build a solid business case to present to leadership.
-  **Perform due diligence in selecting a vendor.**
UChicago Medicine invested time in exploring options and interviewing potential vendors. It was important to the success of the project to find the vendor that was best suited to support the organization's particular goals.
-  **Develop a strong engagement strategy.**
Building on vendor recommendations, UChicago Medicine considered what messaging and incentives would resonate with their employees. Their engagement strategy included informational postcards that piqued interest, a free scale, coaching, food tracking, a support network, benchmark completion gifts, and a program completion gift card. Monitoring participation to determine whether adjustments were needed also helped to maintain high levels of engagement.



For more case studies featuring employer successes in diabetes prevention visit the Coverage Toolkit's [Coverage in Practice](#) page.

EMPLOYER NETWORK

Preventing Type 2 Diabetes, One Workplace at A Time

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