

## Wellness

### Employers Should Explore New Options For Dealing With Costly Diabetes, Group Says

**D**iabetes threatens the health of over a hundred million employees, and employers should consider new approaches to managing the disease, according to a report released May 12 by the Northeast Business Group on Health.

The report, “Transforming Diabetes Management: New Directions for Employers,” said that diabetes accounts for \$175 billion in direct medical costs and \$70 billion in indirect costs stemming from lost productivity, disability, mortality and early retirement.

Close to 10 percent of Americans currently have diabetes, and estimates show that approximately 33 percent will have it by 2050, the NEBGH, a health care coalition, said.

“Tackling diabetes is a top priority for our employer members, and they’re frustrated by the failure of traditional diabetes management programs,” Laurel Pickering, president and CEO of the NEBGH, said in a press release announcing the report. “New models of care, combined with employer-sponsored activities such as providing rewards and incentives, creating a culture of health and experimenting with digital tools that support employee engagement, create a new landscape of diabetes management solutions that could really help employers move the needle when it comes to the diabetes epidemic.”

New offerings in diabetes care delivery highlighted in the report include:

- Patient-centered medical homes—a primary care delivery model where health care is delivered by a coordinated team of interdisciplinary providers with an emphasis on follow-up and communication.

- On-site/near-site and convenience clinics—employers either contract with a health service provider to offer on-site primary care services or, in conjunction with nearby businesses, develop a joint near-site clinic for employees’ primary care needs.

- Pharmacist-led care—pharmacists are integrated into care delivery. Develop a model that ensures greater care coordination with pharmacists and interdisciplinary providers.

The report found that employers that work with health plans to craft designs that steer employees to providers that emphasize follow-up and communication experienced reduced absenteeism.

A New Jersey-based health system developed a diabetes patient care program and saw a 50 percent reduction in sick leave requests among patients in the program, the report said.

Innovative approaches to diabetes care delivery should be driven by payment models that incentivize providers to deliver high-value care and are structured to promote value of services, not volume, the report said. It’s important for employers to evaluate new approaches based on the needs of their specific employee populations and the organizational landscape, it added.

“Employers have so much to gain with even modest success in diabetes management—and so much to lose if nothing is done,” Jeremy Nobel, NEBGH Solutions Center executive director, said in the press release. “Managing diabetes is a daily, and in some cases an hourly, activity for employees and family members, and employers understand that. In addition to new innovative models of care, they’ve expressed strong interest in the potential of new digital tools for supporting employees across the needs spectrum—everything from app-based glucometers and weight and activity trackers, to online diabetes support groups and digital gaming. Huge numbers of tools are out there and most need rigorous testing in a workplace setting, but the potential is there.”

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For more information on the report, go to [http://www.nebgh.org/resources/NEBGH%20Diabetes%20Report%20\\_Directions.pdf](http://www.nebgh.org/resources/NEBGH%20Diabetes%20Report%20_Directions.pdf).

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