

## Workplace Wellness: Exercise Your Options

### The Issue:

- Preventable, lifestyle-related illness accounts for 75% of the \$1.5 trillion annual medical care costs in the United States. The annual economic costs to Michigan of heart disease, physical inactivity, obesity and tobacco use are more than \$30 billion (*Michigan Steps Up*, Michigan Department of Community Health, 2005).
- Michigan's overall poor health status results in lost productivity, employee absenteeism, disability, decreased employee pool, increased insurance costs, and decreased appeal of Michigan to business start-ups. (*Michigan Steps Up*, Michigan Department of Community Health).
- Nearly 60 percent of U.S. workers earn their paychecks in an office setting versus more physically demanding occupations, reducing the chance for work-related exercise. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- Seventy-one percent of executives say corporations have a responsibility to promote health and wellness among their employees. But an American Management Association survey indicated that 92 percent of companies have vending machines that sell fast food and beverages, including candy, snacks and soft drinks.

### What Can Be Done:

- Better nutrition in the workplace can raise productivity, reduce sick days and reduce the number of on-the-job accidents, according to a study by the International Labor Office of the United Nations.
- There are many no- or low-cost strategies for creating healthier work environments, including:
  - Add healthy eating options to vending machines, cafeterias and meeting refreshments
  - Allow for activity breaks
  - Management can support and model healthy behaviors(*Michigan Steps Up*, Michigan Department of Community Health)
- A new study confirms that working in highly stressful jobs can increase blood pressure (*American Journal of Public Health*, August 2006). Another study found that people who consumed three or more servings of dairy foods a day had significantly lower blood pressure than those who consumed less than half a serving a day (*Hypertension*, 2006).
- A study in the *American Journal of Hypertension* found that more than \$200 billion in healthcare costs could be saved over five years by increasing consumption of lowfat milk, yogurt and cheese to 3-A-Day™.
- According to the American Dietetic Association, spacing meals three to four hours apart makes it easier to stay energized throughout the day, so an afternoon snack at the office can be a healthy choice.