

Best Practices in Corporate Wellness

Industry Focus: Utilites

Featured Company: Avista Corporation

Based in Spokane, Washington, Avista is involved in the production, transmission and distribution of energy as well as other energy-related businesses. Avista offers a self-insured medical plan covering its 1,600 active employees and 900 retirees. Avista covers a portion of the medical premiums for employees and retirees. In exchange, the company expects its insured members to make smart choices about their diet, health and fitness regimens.



"Within three months we had great success with BioIQ. The program is easy to launch, it employs proven strategies to encourage participation, and there are lots of other perks, including professional staff members, an easy to use website, simple kits and more. It was a successful venture."

– Keith Rust, Benefit Program Manager, Avista

When the energy crisis hit in 2000, Avista Corporation sustained cuts to its wellness budget and had to learn how to run its programs with limited resources. Some wellness initiatives disappeared altogether and others were compromised, such as Avista's subsidy for on-site nurses to conduct employee health screenings.

"We simply didn't have the staff or the budget to do everything we wanted to do," recalls Keith Rust, a benefit program manager at Avista who spearheads the utility company's wellness program. "This is what led us to BioIQ. Its home-testing program is easy and effective, plus the overall cost was less than what we had been paying for on-site screening. BioIQ offered tests that the on-site screening company didn't, like an A1c test for diabetes.

"We want to continue to offer wellness benefits, but we have to figure out how to maximize value for the money we spend," Rust adds. "That's why we are encouraging people to take better care of themselves and participate in preventive programs such as yearly biometric screenings."

"A lot of the health screening companies have good products, but BioIQ has a unique process as well. This is what enables BioIQ to achieve such high participation rates."

--Kathy Worden, Co-founder, WorkWell Consultants

Seeking Expert Advice

To help contend with its dwindling wellness budget and line up effective wellness solutions, Avista partnered with WorkWell Consultants, a health and wellness consulting company based in Spokane.

"When it comes to wellness, many companies grab at straws," says Kathy Worden, co-founder of WorkWell Consultants. "They try a little of this and a little of that without adopting a strategic outlook or considering a multi-year plan. We help organizations such as Avista find cost-effective solutions that are sustainable over the long term."

Worden and her team evaluated all of the leading on-site and at-home screening vendors. After extensive research and interviews, they determined that BioIQ was the best fit for Avista's needs.

"A lot of the health screening companies have good products, but BioIQ has a unique approach as well that accommodates each client's individual needs and demographics," Worden says. "This is what enables BioIQ to achieve such high participation rates."

Following Worden's recommendation, Avista was keen to engage BioIQ and roll out a home-testing program. They especially liked how BioIQ packaged an A1c test with a complete lipid panel (LDL, HDL, Total Cholesterol and Triglycerides), which would allow Avista to screen its employees for both diabetes and heart disease with one simple test. BioIQ also offered an online health risk assessment (HRA) and could integrate lab results with HRA data to create comprehensive personal health records.

“BioIQ’s HRA is woven into its online process, which makes it easier for employees to complete seamlessly and to get usable data,” Worden says. “In the end, that’s a critical component of any wellness program.”

In short, BioIQ acts as a cornerstone of the overall wellness program by enabling the acquisition of health data from everyone in the population, and then by making sure that the data gets integrated into other wellness tools and services. At-home screening supports and enables the overall wellness strategy.



Lowering Costs While Boosting Convenience

Rust and his team liked the low relative cost of BioIQ. Avista’s employees liked the convenience. As opposed to fasting for 12 hours and coming to work without coffee or breakfast, and then waiting in line to have a nurse draw their blood, they could take the BioIQ test at home when they woke up in the morning after a natural fasting period.

“The take-home kit was much easier and more convenient than the on-site testing, and the average meeting time to explain the process only took about 20 minutes,” says Rust.

Rust and his wellness staff demonstrated how to perform the BioIQ test, which involves pricking the tip of one finger, squeezing a few drops of blood on to a sample cartridge and then dropping it in the mail for routing to BioIQ's advanced diagnostics lab.

"We conducted about 30 employee meetings to stress the importance of the health screenings and make sure everybody understood what was required of them," he says. "We wanted the first year to be a success so that future years would be easier. We plan to offer BioIQ for at least three years."

Avista had computers available for participants to create their secure BioIQ accounts. Alternatively, people could do this at home. Once registered with BioIQ, they could log in at any time to a personal health dashboard, which displays the results of the HRA assessment, lab reports, physician discussion forms and links to the BioIQ Knowledge Center, where they could learn more about their health. All participants also had access to 24-hour customer support and health coaches through the BioIQ program

"We will definitely recommend BioIQ in the future and we think their program is conducive to employers of any size. The combination A1c/lipid panel test kit is especially popular, as well as their adaptability to individual client needs."

--Kathy Worden, Co-founder, WorkWell Consultants

While employees were impressed by how easy the website was to use, Rust saw the work BioIQ had done behind the scenes. BioIQ's sophisticated health integration platform keeps individual lab results private yet rolls up the group totals to create aggregate reports for management. The platform also makes it easy to integrate BioIQ health records with electronic health records from just about any other wellness provider or health plan. Rust also liked BioIQ's automated system for tracking users throughout the process: offering guidance, pointing them to online video tutorials, and sending reminders if they wait too long to return their blood sample, neglect to complete the HRA or forget to check their lab results.

"Everything is automated, and yet it is highly personalized," he says. "BioIQ makes each participant feel like their health matters."

People who picked up a BioIQ test kit and didn't send in a blood sample received a personalized, comprehensive set of email communications reminding them to perform the health screening. Partly as a result of this persistent prompting, and also because Avista heavily promoted the program and offered an incentive, 90% of the people who registered completed the HRA and blood test.

Rust credits BioIQ for running a seamless program, but he says their success reflects the foundational underpinnings of any solid wellness program: confidentiality. "We have the trust of employees that their information is 100% confidential," he says. "Having BioIQ maintain the data records as an independent third-party reinforces employee confidence."

Validating the Accuracy

A handful of employees whose biometric levels were out of range questioned BioIQ's lab results. Some of them visited their doctors and had them perform the identical tests. In all cases the BioIQ results were deemed accurate.

"Some of these individuals went on to get a complete physical exam, and found out that their health risks were real," confirms Rust. "The BioIQ test results were not only accurate, they encouraged employees to visit the doctor to find out more information. This type of proactive action is what we strive for in our wellness program.

"We believe in positive reinforcement and incentives, rather than penalties," Rust concludes. "By encouraging employees to do what's right, they feel responsible for staying healthy. And it's starting to work! Many of our employees have a renewed interest in the wellness program and are excited about our upcoming initiatives."