



# the CommonHealth Compass

## CommonHealth Still a Trailblazer After 30 years



Do you remember 1986? The year of Halley's Comet, the Super Bowl Shuffle and gas that cost just \$0.89 a gallon? In that same year we first celebrated Martin Luther King Day as a national holiday, Top Gun was the top grossing movie and Oprah came to television.

While all of this was happening, the medical community was discussing research about how lifestyle affects health. New ideas about healthy living emerged, and individuals and employers were beginning to take notice. It was in these long ago days that the Commonwealth of Virginia first offered a comprehensive wellness program to employees. Thirty years later, CommonHealth continues to lead the way in employee wellness, striving to make Virginia's employees the healthiest in the nation.

Virginia was the first state in the country to offer employee wellness programs in a revolutionary culture change that put employee health at the center of its human resource management strategy. A pilot health promotion program for the Department of Highways and Transportation had achieved success in helping employees engage in their own health choices. The pilot paved the way for additional funding from the General Assembly for health promotion programs statewide. The College of William and Mary was the site of the first official CommonHealth program, which included medical screenings, fitness classes, weight control, stress management, healthy back programs, and numerous challenges and activities. Since then, CommonHealth has continued to engage employees to be champions of their own health, spurring more than 500 agency locations to sign on to the program.

CommonHealth programs cover diverse health and wellness subjects presented in a variety of formats – such as onsite programs and online materials - that make it easy to participate. All state employees may take part in the program, and are given the latest information about taking good care of themselves, their families and their communities. Unique campaigns are introduced several times a year on topics like heart healthy eating, incorporating fitness into your busy workday, and reducing stress. Employees have shared their experiences over the years about programs that help them stay fit and healthy, yet are also educational and fun.

Nine regional coordinators from the Department of Human Resource Management implement the CommonHealth program, helping to give employees across Virginia the resources to maintain or reach optimal health. Together the



CommonHealth coordinators have more than 200 years of expertise in healthcare and fitness. They specialize in making wellness information practical, accessible and fun, allowing employees to easily implement small changes that may have big health results.

Each agency participating in CommonHealth designates an agency coordinator who works with a regional coordinator to deliver wellness programs to employees. The program has more than 600 dedicated volunteers who serve as agency coordinators helping to implement CommonHealth programs.

If your agency is currently involved in CommonHealth programs, keep up the great work! If you are not active with CommonHealth, now is the time to get employees engaged and committed to maintaining healthier lifestyles.

Be a part of CommonHealth – and part of the next 30 years of working well!



## Autumn Health and Safety Tips

Follow these tips to help you and your family stay safe and healthy this autumn!

### Keep your kids safe and healthy.

Get involved with your kids' activities at home and at school to help ensure they are safe and healthy.

### Take steps to prevent the flu.

The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year in the fall. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands often. Stay home if you get sick.

### Get smart about antibiotics.

Antibiotics can cure bacterial infections, but not viral infections. The common cold and the flu are viral infections, so avoid using antibiotics if you have one of these. Using antibiotics when they are not needed causes some bacteria to become resistant to the antibiotic, and therefore stronger and harder to kill. See your doctor or nurse to find out if your illness is bacterial or viral.

### Test and replace batteries.

Check or replace carbon monoxide batteries twice a year when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Replace smoke alarm alkaline batteries at least once a year. Test alarms every month to ensure they work properly.

### Keep food safe.

Food is center stage during the holidays. Be sure to keep it safe by following basic food safety steps. Clean hands and surfaces often. Separate foods to avoid cross-contamination. Cook to proper temperatures. Chill promptly.

### Be prepared for cold weather.

Exposure to cold temperatures can cause serious health problems. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk, but anyone can be affected. Know how to prevent health problems and what to do if a cold-weather emergency arises. Remember that using space heaters and fireplaces can increase the risk of household fires and carbon monoxide poisoning.

### Don't drink and drive.

Alcohol use impairs skills needed to drive a car safely. It slows reaction time and impairs judgment and coordination. Alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes kill someone every 31 minutes and non-fatally injure someone every two minutes. Don't drink and drive, and don't let others drink and drive.

### Wash your hands.

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. It's best to wash your hands with soap and clean running water for 20 seconds. If that's not possible, use alcohol-based hand rubs.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/family/autumn/>

## Memories Through the Years ...



## CommonHealth Salutes!



**Nancy Rodrigues**  
**Secretary of Administration**

Secretary Rodrigues has shown boundless enthusiasm for the health of Virginia's employees. Sharing the Governor's passion for a competitive and healthy workforce, she has met with more than 300 CommonHealth agency coordinators to thank them for spreading the Commonwealth's wellness message. In addition, the Secretary walks the walk! She replaced her traditional desk with a stand-up work desk and wears a Fitbit to count steps. Secretary Rodrigues is on the frontlines letting supervisors, managers and employees know how crucial wellness is to an organization's success.



**Jacqueline Menefee**  
**DSS Agency Coordinator**

Jacqueline Menefee has been a CommonHealth coordinator since the Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) in Danville began participating in the program. She originally got involved because she thought it would be a benefit to learn how to maintain a healthier lifestyle and to assist others, too - she continues in the role because it is! Jacqueline has enjoyed encouraging and seeing coworkers get results from just a little effort of improving habits to last a lifetime. Among the events she has coordinated are Turkey Trots in the fall, health cooking demonstrations from a hospital dietician, presentations from the Cooperative Extension Service, and numerous weight loss competitions.



**Amy Carter, SHRM-CP, PHR**  
**HR Consultant Sr.**  
**Bristol VDOT Office**

Amy Carter has been a huge inspiration to many people in the Bristol District of VDOT after having lost over 125 pounds in the last couple of years, says Connie Hope, her supervisor. She did this the old fashioned way of healthy eating and exercise. Connie shares that Amy's "positive attitude and eagerness to help employees has always been her strengths. I am so proud of Amy's accomplishments and in awe of her dedication to improving her health and that of all VDOT employees!"



**Tara Roe**  
**James Madison University**  
**Human Resources Benefits Specialist**

As a member of JMU's HR benefits team, Tara has a full plate of benefits related tasks, yet she devotes a portion of her work week to achieving the goal of making James Madison University CommonHealth Worksite Certified. "The efforts Tara has made have taken CommonHealth from what was once a little-known benefit to a valuable program that is now widely recognized and supported at JMU," says Cathy Thomas of JMU. Tara's fun and humorous attitude paired with her highly organized and professional skills have led to big success in employee wellness.



**Sue Anne Ehmann**  
**Patrick Henry Community College**  
**Exec. Assistant to V.P. for Finance and Administration**

Sue Ann Ehmann has been "inspiring our employees (and students) to be active since her first day at the College," say Lori McCarty and Ophelia Griggs. Whether it is the daily email messages focusing on the health and fitness of the mind, body and soul or the facilitation of Fit & Fun during lunch for those who want to get active during the work day, Sue Ann brings her passion for wellness to her job every day.



**Gayatri Veerabhadrapa**  
**Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center**  
**Night Nurse**

Gayatri "Veera" Veerabhadrapa has impacted on her fellow employees' physical and mental health. She is a registered nurse on night shift who not only encourages activity through the long hours of the 3rd shift at the Center, but she also regularly prepares meals for her coworkers in their breakroom!

Elizabeth Brogan says that Veera "leads by example by walking circuits around the unit every night, even getting some of her fellow coworkers to walk with her. Following her nightly walk she then begins her preparations for a healthy meal, a meal with healthy, fresh ingredients that she prepares for all of us."

## Call Her “Ms. CommonHealth”



**Mary Louise Gerdes** has been with the CommonHealth program since it began in 1986. When the College of William and Mary began offering CommonHealth as part of the benefits package to campus faculty and staff, Mary Louise helped create a successful and comprehensive program catered to employee health. Thanks to the seeds she planted at W&M 30 years ago, CommonHealth has evolved into a model program introduced to state agencies and local governments across Virginia.

Back in 1986, Mary Louise had a clear vision about her career and the impact that she could have on people’s lives: “Wellness is more than not being sick; it is an approach to health aimed at reducing the risk of serious illness. Individuals must understand that the way we live has a lot to do with our health.”

Taking that idea to heart, Mary Louise has dedicated her work life to helping state employees identify health risks, set personal goals to decrease health risks, and make changes for better health.

Regional Coordinators have found it a joy to work alongside Mary Louise. Her co-workers, who are more like family, and the coordinators at agency locations have some amazing memories and thoughts:

“At those staff meetings in Richmond, Mary Louise always led the way in creating new and exciting ways to engage employees in wellness.”

“Mary Louise met her husband at a CommonHealth biometric screening almost 30 years ago! The onsite health screenings have helped thousands of state employees avoid serious health problems.”

“Mary Louise has empowered many employees to find a type of exercise to fit their schedule, their abilities, and their lifestyle.”

“She has always been there with calm, patient words that encourage and guide others. Her background and experience truly provide perspective.”

Kudos, Ms. CommonHealth!

## Getting the Most from Weight Management Programs

From Calorie King to Weight Watchers, state employees and their families have many programs to choose from when



trying to improve their health and manage their weight. The state health plans offer a number

of web-based programs that focus on nutrition, digital and telephone health coaching, diet and exercise.

Since 2008, state employees, spouses and adult family members have been able to pay a special corporate rate for Weight Watchers services. You can receive this rate by going to the state Weight Watchers portal or calling the toll-free number at 1-866-204-2885. In addition, employees eligible for state healthcare may be reimbursed for half

of the cost of Weight Watchers services by submitting a reimbursement application. Visit the Weight Watchers web page at <http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/employeeprograms/weightwatchers> for more information. Details about accessing the portal are at <http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/employee-programs/employeeprograms/dhrmwgateway.pdf>.

Jenny Craig, Nutrisystem, Power Up (for women), fitness center discounts and Healthy Solutions at Home, Inc., are among the other discounts for health and fitness offered to employees. For a comparison of programs by organization or health plan, visit <http://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/employee-programs/discount-comparison-2016.pdf>.



### Visit CommonHealth Online!

[www.commonhealth.virginia.gov](http://www.commonhealth.virginia.gov)

Questions? E-mail us at [wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov](mailto:wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov).



101 N. 14th Street  
Richmond, VA 23219