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panhandle WORKSITE WELLNESS COUNCIL
Proudly part of Panhandle Public Health District

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Diabetes Awareness Month: Working Together for a Healthier Panhandle

November is National Diabetes Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about diabetes, encourage prevention and early detection, and support those living with the disease. Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) is encouraging residents and community partners to work together to reduce the impact of diabetes across western Nebraska.

Diabetes continues to be a significant health concern in the Nebraska Panhandle. According to the Center for Disease Control BRFSS Places survey in 2023, the Panhandle diabetes prevalence is 13% compared to 10.7% across the state. This means approximately one in nine adults in the region was living with diagnosed diabetes at that time.

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes and can lead to serious health complications, including heart disease, kidney disease, vision loss, and nerve damage. The good news is that type 2 diabetes can often be prevented or delayed through healthy lifestyle changes, and individuals already living with diabetes can take steps to manage their condition and reduce complications.

“Diabetes prevention doesn't have to be complicated,” said Cheri Farris, Wellbeing Programs Coordinator at PPHD. “Small, consistent changes in how we eat, move, manage stress, and care for ourselves can make a meaningful difference. Just as importantly, we need to make sure people have access to the information, programs, and support that help them succeed.”

Join the Fight Against Diabetes: A Community-Wide Effort
Recognizing that lasting improvements in community health require collaboration, PPHD has established the Panhandle Diabetes Prevention and Management Coalition. The coalition brings together healthcare professionals, public health organizations, educators, community leaders, employers, and interested residents to strengthen diabetes prevention and management efforts throughout the Nebraska Panhandle.

The coalition is focused on four key areas:

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- Prevention: Promoting healthy lifestyles and expanding access to evidence-based programs that reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- Education: Increasing awareness of diabetes, prediabetes, risk factors, and available community resources.
- Early Identification: Encouraging diabetes risk assessments, screenings, and connections to healthcare providers.
- Better Management: Helping individuals living with diabetes access education, self-management resources, and ongoing support.

In addition to sharing information, coalition members identify community needs, explore barriers to care, coordinate resources, and develop opportunities to reach more residents with the resources and care they may need, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

“Addressing diabetes takes more than one organization or one program. It takes a community working together,” Farris said. “Our coalition is an opportunity to turn awareness into action. By connecting people, sharing resources, and working toward common goals, we can make a greater impact on diabetes prevention and management throughout the Panhandle.”

Community members and organizations are invited to get involved. The coalition meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m., with meetings featuring educational presentations, resource sharing, and collaborative planning. Participation is open to anyone interested in helping improve diabetes prevention and management in the region.

Building on a Strong History of Diabetes Prevention

PPHD has a long-standing commitment to helping Panhandle residents reduce their risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Between 2012 and 2026, PPHD has coordinated 118 National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) cohorts, reaching more than 1,200 participants. Together, participants lost more than 11,000 pounds and worked toward achieving 150 minutes of physical activity each week.

The National DPP is a CDC-recognized lifestyle change program that helps adults with prediabetes or at high risk for type 2 diabetes build healthier habits through nutrition, physical activity, stress management, and ongoing support.

These accomplishments demonstrate what is possible when individuals, healthcare providers, lifestyle coaches, and community partners work together to make prevention a priority.

Small Steps Can Make a Big Difference

During Diabetes Awareness Month, PPHD encourages residents to take simple steps to support their health:

1. Know your risk. Talk with your healthcare provider about diabetes screening, especially if you have a family history of diabetes, are overweight, or have other risk factors.

2. Move more. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. Walking, gardening, dancing, and other enjoyable activities all count.
3. Eat for better health. Include more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins while reducing sugary drinks.
4. Prioritize sleep and stress management. Healthy sleep habits and managing stress can support overall health and blood sugar management.
5. Find support. Connect with a healthcare provider, diabetes educator, lifestyle change program, or community resource to help build sustainable habits.

Together, We Can Make a Difference
Diabetes Awareness Month is a reminder that everyone has a role in building healthier communities. Whether through personal lifestyle changes, helping a friend or family member, referring someone to a prevention program, or joining the Panhandle Diabetes Prevention and Management Coalition, every action contributes to a healthier Panhandle.

To learn more about diabetes prevention resources or to become involved in the coalition, contact Cheri Farris at 308-220-8020 or cfarris@pphd.ne.gov.

For more information about local health programs and resources, contact Nicole Berosek, Wellness and Prevention Program Manager, at nberosek@pphd.ne.gov, or 308-279-3496.

Did you see the latest PWWC newsletter? If not, check it out here: https://pphd.ne.gov/pwwc.html
For additional information about worksite wellness, visit http://www.pphd.ne.gov/pwwc.html or call Berosek at 308-279-3496. The Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council is proudly part of Panhandle Public Health District.

The Panhandle Worksite Wellness Council specializes in supporting employers in the Panhandle region. We recognize that many employers support a diverse and remote workforce and offer innovative ways to overcome the challenge of working with a virtual team. We understand that many of our employers do not have full-time wellness resources and work to provide resources and training to make running a worksite wellness program as easy as possible.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle community.