

Implementing Wellness

A Guide for Employers



This guide aims to help the TSET Healthy Living Program grantees as they work with employers to implement wellness policies. The guide includes talking points, success stories, and key definitions about wellness policies.

INTRODUCTION

This guide aims to help the TSET Healthy Living Program grantees as they work with employers in the business, community institution and organization, and city and government sector sectors to implement wellness policies. Specifically, this guide does the following:

- Provides talking points that outline the benefits of implementing a wellness policy in an employer setting
- Shares success stories from employers in the business, community institution and organization, and city and government sectors across Oklahoma
- Outlines the wellness policy provisions for the business, community institution and organization, and city and government sectors and provides implementation strategies and resources for each provision
- Defines small employers and highlights wellness policy implementation strategies in a small employer setting

USING THE WELLNESS POLICY TOOLKITS AND THIS IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

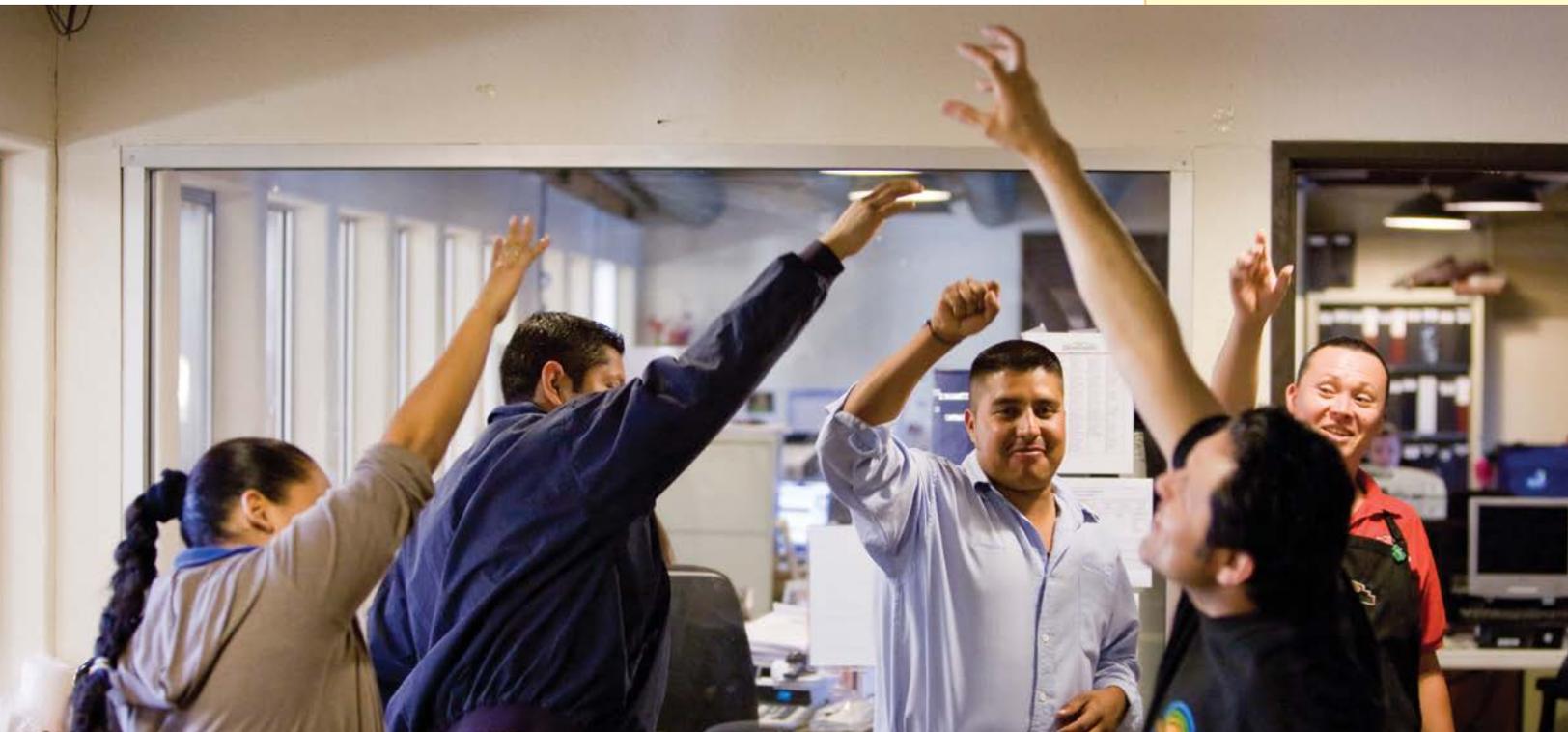
As a reminder, the existing wellness policy toolkits guide TSET Healthy Living Program grantees through the development and adoption of wellness policies in the business, community institution and organization, and city and government sectors. The toolkits also provide wellness policies specific to each sector. Those toolkits are available at www.okintheknow.org. This guide, *Implementing Wellness: A Guide for Employers*, can be used in tandem with the wellness policy toolkits.

In addition to using the existing wellness policy toolkits, Appendix A of this guide summarizes the wellness policy provisions for the business, community institution and organization, and city and government sectors and provides implementation strategies and resources for the policies. Whether an employer has already adopted a wellness policy or is considering adopting a wellness policy, the strategies listed in Appendix A can help the employer put the wellness policy into practice.

Wellness Policy Toolkits

The following wellness policy toolkits guide TSET Healthy Living Program grantees through the development and adoption of a wellness policy and provide wellness policies specific to each sector.

- *Model Workplace Wellness Policy Toolkit for Oklahoma Businesses*
- *Model Wellness Policy Toolkit for Oklahoma Congregations*
- *Model Wellness Policy Toolkit for Oklahoma Child Care Facilities*
- *Model Wellness Policy Toolkit for Out-of-School Time Programs in Oklahoma*
- *Partnering With Local Governments to Adopt a Workplace Wellness Policy through a Resolution*



THE VALUE OF WORKPLACE WELLNESS

Workplace wellness policies and programs make both economic and health sense. Each year, employers spend thousands of dollars per employee covering the costs of chronic diseases, such as hypertension, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. These conditions and illnesses can give people a poor quality of life and lead to premature death and disability.³⁻⁵ Furthermore, chronic diseases place a substantial financial burden on local economies due to lost productivity, compromised employee performance, and increased health costs.⁶ To combat these challenges, many employers are developing, adopting, and implementing workplace wellness policies and programs.

The good news is employers, even small employers, care about the health and wellness of their employees. A recent survey of employers with 2 to 9 employees, 10 to 49 employees, and 50 to 100 employees found that most employers in each size category pay close attention to employees' health and agree that wellness is worth the investment.⁷

What are workplace wellness programs?

Workplace wellness programs provide employees with activities and services that promote health and help prevent chronic disease. They may include weight loss programs, exercise classes, walking groups, tobacco cessation services, health education, and medical screenings.²¹



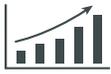
Adopting and Implementing a Wellness Policy Saves Money and Lives

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's review of nearly 50 peer-reviewed studies found that multi-component worksite obesity prevention programs and smokefree policies are cost-effective and improve health within five years.⁸⁻¹⁰ By implementing a wellness policy, employers may receive these benefits:



Improved employee health

Small employers that implement wellness programs have been found to be more effective in influencing positive health behaviors, health perceptions, and life satisfaction than larger employers.¹¹ In general, employee participation in workplace wellness programs has been found to increase exercise frequency, decrease smoking, and improve weight control,⁶ all of which help reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases. In addition, workplace wellness programs have been found to be associated with reductions in body fat percentage and BMI.*^{12,13} Tobacco-free policies are proven to save lives. More than 55 peer-reviewed research studies have found that smokefree policies effectively reduce tobacco use, exposure to secondhand smoke, and tobacco-related illnesses and death.¹⁰



Greater productivity and fewer sick days

Increasing productivity and decreasing sick days can be especially important in small employer settings because there are fewer employees, and many employees have several job responsibilities. Comprehensive worksite wellness policies and programs that include nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco use have been shown to increase productivity by an average of 41%.¹⁴ Additionally, the American Productivity Audit found that tobacco use was a leading cause of lost productive time, accounting for more lost time than family emergencies and alcohol.^{15,16} Lost productivity can cost employers more than \$3,500 per person who smokes, per year.³



Decreased health care costs

Health care costs of inactive adults are approximately \$1,400 higher than the costs for active adults.¹⁷ Even adults who occasionally engage in physical activity, but not the recommended daily amount, have health care costs that are approximately \$700 higher than active adults.¹⁷ People who smoke have higher hospital admission rates and insurance payments, which, on average, cost their employers more than \$2,000 in extra health care costs each year.³ In addition, Oklahoma spends more than \$1.7 billion, or \$588 per adult, on obesity-related health care costs.⁴



Return on investment

Workplace wellness programs save between \$1.50 and \$3.80 for every dollar invested.¹⁸ One study assessing the return on investment to employers that developed workplace obesity interventions found that a 5% weight loss among overweight and obese employees would result in an annual reduction of medical and absenteeism costs by an average of \$90.¹⁹ ROI data is harder to measure among small employers for a variety of reasons. However, small employers may see monetary benefits of implementing wellness in the form of lower absenteeism, lower workers' compensation fees, lower short- and long-term disability, and lower turnover.²⁰



Improved image and employee morale

A workplace wellness policy demonstrates that an employer cares about the health of its employees, visitors, and community. This sense of investment contributes to employee satisfaction and community perception of the employer.



* BMI, or body mass index, is a screening tool that approximates a person's body fat percentage using height and weight. BMI is not a diagnostic tool, but high BMI may indicate overweight and obesity.

OKLAHOMA SUCCESS STORIES

The following success stories represent the business, city and government, and community institutions and organizations sectors in Oklahoma. These employers range in size from 15 employees to 150 employees. Each success story includes a list of wellness implementation strategies that have contributed to their successes. In addition, each of these employers has adopted wellness policies using the wellness policy toolkits available to TSET Healthy Living Program grantees.

COURSEY ENTERPRISES: IDABEL, OKLAHOMA, WITH 20 EMPLOYEES

Friendly Competition and Lasting Changes

Coursey Enterprises in Idabel, Oklahoma, is a family-owned and -operated business that sells medical supplies and nurse skills packs to over 500 schools in 47 states as well as the District of Columbia and the Caribbean islands. The business operates out of a 20,000-square-foot facility and employs between 10 and 20 employees, depending on the season.

Imagine having 10 to 20 colleagues. Beyond learning how they work and what time they eat lunch, you probably also know where they went to high school and the names of their family members. You're like family. And, in this family-owned business, a little friendly, family-like competition has helped create a culture of wellness.

In 2012, Shea Coursey, vice president and general manager, wanted to improve the energy and efficiency of employees, especially during the after-lunch slump. Using his own competitive nature, he started a weight loss competition for employees. The winner, determined by percentage of weight lost, won a day off work! This one-time friendly competition turned into several lasting healthy changes.

First, Coursey held a nutrition training day for employees to learn more about healthy eating habits. From there, the business began offering free healthy snacks and drinks in the workplace, dedicating a space of the warehouse for exercise, and encouraging regular physical activity breaks throughout the day.

Coursey says, "Employee energy increased due to the change in diet, and there was an increase in excitement due to competing, learning, and trying new foods. Our staff also felt like management cared about each person because we showed concern for them personally. All of the training and the healthy living changes we've made cost us little to no money. Since implementing these wellness strategies, I've noticed an increase in productivity, lower than average turnover rate, more interest in our business from community members and potential employees, and an all-around enjoyable work environment."



Implementation Strategies from Coursey Enterprises

Promoting Good Nutrition:

- Share printouts and hold discussions on the latest diet trends
- Offer healthy foods and beverages at staff meetings and in the break room, free of charge
- Offer free water infused with fruit

Promoting Physical Activity:

- Share printouts and hold discussions on the latest workout trends
- Host basketball games—the winners go home a few minutes early
- Host Easter egg hunts with lunch money hidden in the eggs
- Host foot races around the facility
- Build a bike rack out of PVC pipe
- Provide vouchers for athletic shoes at your local sports outfitter
- Provide lightweight jackets with the business logo for fall and spring outdoor activities
- Provide a workout area with equipment for employees and community members
- Sponsor team sports
- Encourage church league sport participation

Promoting Tobacco Free Living:

- Prohibit use of all tobacco products on company property



THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER: STIGLER, OKLAHOMA, WITH 150 EMPLOYEES

Making Communities Healthier by Starting from Within

The Health and Wellness Center (HWC) is a Federally Qualified Health Center that has provided quality health care for communities since it opened in March 2005. The center has 7 clinics in eastern Oklahoma and serves any and all patients with a focus on those that are uninsured or under-insured. All services, including medical care, dental care, optometry, behavioral health care, and pharmacy, are provided to patients based on income. Brooke Lattimore, chief operating officer, says that HWC's "primary focus is wellness." And she believes that includes the wellness of HWC staff in addition to patients.

Lattimore says HWC started a wellness initiative because "we wanted to provide the same wellness opportunities to our employees that we provide to community members. And, better wellness equals more productivity."

With Lattimore's leadership, HWC formed a wellness team made up of at least one representative from each department to develop wellness activities and to adopt an official wellness policy. Current wellness activities include a water consumption challenge that encourages employees to drink 64 ounces of water per day and a step challenge that encourages employees to meet various step goals per day.

The wellness team has noticed that these challenges and other wellness activities improve employee morale, motivate everyone to work together, and inspire community members to implement wellness strategies in their own workplaces.

In the future, HWC would like to incorporate strategies to improve financial health and mental health into their wellness plan. For now, Lattimore and the other wellness champions will create new challenges and initiatives to maintain staff engagement and continue improving the wellness of staff and patients.

Implementation Strategies from the Health and Wellness Center

Promoting Good Nutrition:

- *Water challenge—encourage everyone to drink 64 ounces of water per day. Employees received a water bottle to help keep them on track.*

Promoting Physical Activity:

- *Step challenges—encourage everyone to move more. Employees sign up for a four-month challenge and commit to taking 5,000 steps per day for the first two months. In the last two months, the goal increases to 8,000 steps per day. Employees receive a FitBit to track steps just for signing up for the challenges. If they meet the goals, they keep the FitBit.*
- *Relay teams for community races—reimburse the entry fee for the race as long as the employee attends and completes the race. Employees have to return the race bib to receive reimbursement.*

Promoting Tobacco Free Living:

- *Prohibit use of all tobacco products on HWC property.*

CITY OF CRESCENT: CRESCENT, OKLAHOMA, WITH 15 EMPLOYEES

Leading Wellness from the Top

Janet Smith, city manager of Crescent, Oklahoma, recommended that her city council adopt a wellness policy for employees just months after she took on her management role. Smith says, "Wellness is a top priority for me. That is why I strive to change the culture of our organization, and through small steps we will achieve the change I wish to see." Leading the way, and leading by example, Smith has incorporated innovative approaches to health and wellness into the workday.

Under Smith's leadership, the City of Crescent has moved forward with healthy initiatives and incremental changes to the office environment. Some of those changes include becoming a vape- and smoke-free workplace, authorized by the city council; updating the chairs and adding a new filtered water machine in the employee break room; offering seasonal fruits during staff meetings and in the break room; and promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors by hanging nutritional posters and healthy living posters. New personnel policies have also been added to facilitate healthy behaviors while at work. For example, employees are able to take walk breaks throughout the day, and standing desks are available for employees upon request.

One unique wellness strategy that the City of Crescent has implemented is a sick leave incentive bonus. Every November, employees who have taken less than 32 hours of sick leave receive a \$500 bonus and an extra 8 hours of paid time off. Smith says it's a way of thanking employees for their service and rewarding their healthy lifestyles.

Since adopting a wellness policy and implementing these environmental changes two years ago, Smith says the city's health insurance rates have decreased by an average of 10%, or \$45 per person per month.

Implementation Strategies from the City of Crescent

Promoting Good Nutrition:

- Provide clean drinking water, free of charge
- Offer seasonal fruits at staff meetings and in the employee break room
- Post signs and flyers to encourage healthy eating
- Offer weight loss challenges

Promoting Physical Activity:

- Allow walk breaks throughout the workday
- Provide standing desks

Promoting Tobacco Free Living:

- Prohibit use of all tobacco products, including vapor products, on city property



SUSTAINING WELLNESS OVER TIME

While there is no magic formula of strategies that will always result in lasting wellness changes for all employers, there are a few general tips and guiding principles for sustaining wellness.

1. Demonstrate leadership support

Support from the leaders (CEO, director, owner, commissioner) makes it clear to employees that health and wellness is a priority. If the employer has already adopted a wellness policy, leadership support for wellness may already exist. Here are a few actions leaders can take to show their consistent support for wellness after the policy has been adopted.

- *Communicate support for wellness policies and programs to employees.* This support should be expressed in person (during staff meetings or events) and in writing (in employee handbooks) and it should be reiterated regularly.
- *Lead by example.* Leaders can participate in wellness activities, incorporate physical activity breaks into meetings, and encourage participation in community health events.
- *Share wellness goals and practices.* Leaders can share their personal wellness goals such as losing weight, drinking more water, or taking the stairs every day, to help motivate employees.

2. Designate a wellness leader

Wellness teams or committees often manage the entire workplace wellness initiative for employers and are responsible for the development, adoption, and implementation of wellness policies and programs. However, even with a wellness team, there often needs to be a single person that is responsible for the wellness initiatives.

Good wellness leaders are

- Committed to and excited about wellness
- Comfortable engaging employees in wellness activities
- Interested in helping others achieve their wellness goals

3. Engage employees

Gathering employee input on the wellness policies and programs is an important part of adopting a wellness policy and implementing wellness strategies. Before adopting a wellness policy, employers should distribute employee interest surveys to gather employee feedback about potential wellness policy provisions. During implementation, continuing to engage employees in the wellness process will help maintain employee interest and participation. Here are a couple of easy ways to engage employees during implementation:

- *Let employees lead.* Allowing employees to take ownership of a specific implementation strategy, such as a walking challenge or leading activity breaks during meetings, begins to change the culture of the workplace.
- *Get creative, but address employees' needs.* Employees, like everyone, can get bored with the same challenges and activities. Incorporate small changes into your regular wellness strategies to keep things fresh and exciting for employees.



A NOTE ON WORKING WITH SMALL EMPLOYERS

Small employers make up a large portion of Oklahoma’s economy. Nearly 95% of all businesses in Oklahoma have fewer than 100 employees. Moreover, nearly 85% of all businesses in Oklahoma have fewer than 20 employees.¹ The industries with the most small employers include professional, scientific, and technical services; health care and social assistance; accommodation and food services; and retail trade.²

As mentioned above, many small employers care about employee wellness and recognize the benefits of wellness policies and programs. However, small employers may not have adequate information about adopting and implementing wellness in a small employer setting.⁷ When working with a small employer, it is important to remember that every employer, regardless of size, will have unique strengths, challenges, opportunities, and resources. The table below provides tailored tips for implementing wellness in small employer settings. The tips in this list are flexible and TSET Healthy Living Program grantees should collaborate with small employers to determine the best steps for implementing wellness in each setting.



Free, Low-Cost, and/or Low-Tech Workplace Wellness Activities

Nutrition	Physical Activity	Tobacco
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify healthy food choices for food sold or served on the property (for example food sold in vending machines) and use colored stickers or other signage to highlight healthy options Provide employees with general information about the importance of eating healthy Post point-of-decision signage to encourage the purchase of healthy foods Conduct a challenge to eat more fruits and vegetables Encourage employees to bring their lunch and share healthy lunch recipes Serve only water and coffee at meetings Encourage employees to bring seasonal fruit to share instead of doughnuts or baked goods Identify nearby restaurants with healthy food choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide walking maps Provide a list of stretches and exercises that can be completed at employees’ desks Post point-of-decision signage to encourage stairwell use Conduct informal walking challenges Conduct informal stairway challenges Promote and encourage use of existing trails and walking paths for physical activity Use existing office space for physical activity such as stretching, in compliance with employer’s safety policy Promote community walks Provide bike racks or other bike storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post “no tobacco use” signage and decals inside and outside buildings Provide health information about the benefits of tobacco-free and vapor-free living Share Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline information for free assistance to those who want to quit Promote statewide or national awareness campaigns and events such as the Great American Smoke Out Communicate and promote available tobacco cessation benefits and insurance coverage for employees Provide and promote cessation resources that are available for employees and family members Remove ash trays from the employer’s property

APPENDIX A: STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING WORKPLACE WELLNESS POLICIES

NOTE: Implementation strategies in Appendix A are marked with a yellow star ★ if they are feasible for small employers. Feasibility is based on cost and staff capacity.

Nutrition Policy Provisions	Implementation Strategies
Selling and offering foods and beverages throughout the workplace, including in the cafeteria, vending machines, and snack bars and during meetings and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ • Educate employees about the changes to the foods and beverages offered and sold at the workplace and how they can benefit from the changes ★ • Offer fresh fruits and vegetables during staff meetings and in the staff break room, kitchen, or dining area • Direct the wellness committee or team to talk to the vendors and food service providers for the employer and come up with a plan for offering and selling foods and beverages that meet these standards
Promoting good nutrition and healthy eating habits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ • Make pitchers of water and glasses available at meetings ★ • Host monthly wellness lunches that encourage employees to bring their lunch and share healthy recipes ★ • Use colored stickers or other signage to highlight healthy options ★ • Conduct an informal challenge to eat more fruits and vegetables ★ • Post point-of-decision signage, such as flyers or stickers, to encourage the purchase of healthy foods • Identify an existing space that meets the policy requirements for a breastfeeding room—this could be an unused office or conference room • Lower the cost of healthy foods and beverages, such as fresh produce and water, and/or raise the cost of unhealthy foods and beverages, such as chips and soda
Physical Activity Policy Provisions	
Making physical activity opportunities widely available and easily accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ • Conduct informal walking challenges ★ • Conduct informal stairwell challenges ★ • Provide a list of stretches that can be performed at employees' desks or during meetings ★ • Incorporate stretch breaks into presentations ★ • Post point-of-decision signage at the elevators and stairwells to encourage stairwell use ★ • Share walking maps of the surrounding area ★ • Promote community walking, running, biking, and other activity-focused events • Use existing office space for physical activity such as stretching, in compliance with employers' safety policy—this space could be an unused office or conference room • Adopt a Shared Use Policy that works best for the employer and the community
Tobacco Free Policy Provisions	
Preventing exposure to secondhand and thirdhand smoke and supporting those who want to stop using tobacco products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ • Include a copy of this policy in the company policy manual and employee training materials ★ • Refer employees interested in quitting tobacco use to the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline and other cessation resources, if available ★ • Remove ash trays from company property • Post signs informing people of this policy, at a minimum, at entrances to all buildings on company property

Implementation Resources

Shape Your Future is a program of TSET that includes useful information and tools on how to create healthier communities through eating more fruits and vegetables, being more physically active, and living tobacco free.

Nutrition

The California Department of Public Health's *Fit Business Kit* includes tips for how businesses can work with vendors to provide healthier food and beverage options.

The *FitPick Product List* provides a list of food and beverage options that meet or exceed the Model Workplace Wellness Policy nutrition provisions.

The *TSET Newsletter* includes nutrition information that can be shared with employees as part of a regular wellness news email update or bulletin board post.

The *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight* resources include tips for adjusting current eating habits for better health such as changing a favorite recipe to use healthier ingredients.

Physical Activity

Step 4 of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Steps to Physical Activity includes tips for implementing physical activity strategies for employers in the beginning, intermediate, and advanced stages of wellness implementation.

This *list of stretches* from The Blue Zones Project can be performed at your desk.

ChangeLab Solutions has several resources and toolkits on Shared Use Policies including guides on creating shared use agreements.

Tobacco Free

The *Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline* website includes resources for those interested in quitting, for friends and family members who want to help someone quit, and for anyone interested in staying tobacco free.

Tobacco Stops With Me, a program of TSET, provides information on living tobacco free and creating tobacco-free places, as well as facts and statistics on tobacco use.



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For more information about the TSET Healthy Living Program, visit TSET.ok.gov.

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