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Participating Organizations in Massachusetts Working on Wellness (WoW): Who Are They? What Wellness Programs Have They Put in Place?

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Et al.

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Laura Punnett, ScD, on behalf of the MA WoW Evaluation Team
at UMass Lowell and UMass Medical

BACKGROUND

- Most worksite health promotion (WHP) programs are offered by larger employers and focus on individual behavior change.
- WoW is specifically designed to recruit and support small and medium-sized employers to develop wellness programs.
- WoW emphasizes interventions at the levels of both the organization and the individual worker.
- We have evaluated the success of this effort in terms of program scope and employers' planned implementation activities.

METHODS

We examined characteristics of participating organizations, along with their new activities and programs and their changes in policies that might influence workers' health behaviors.

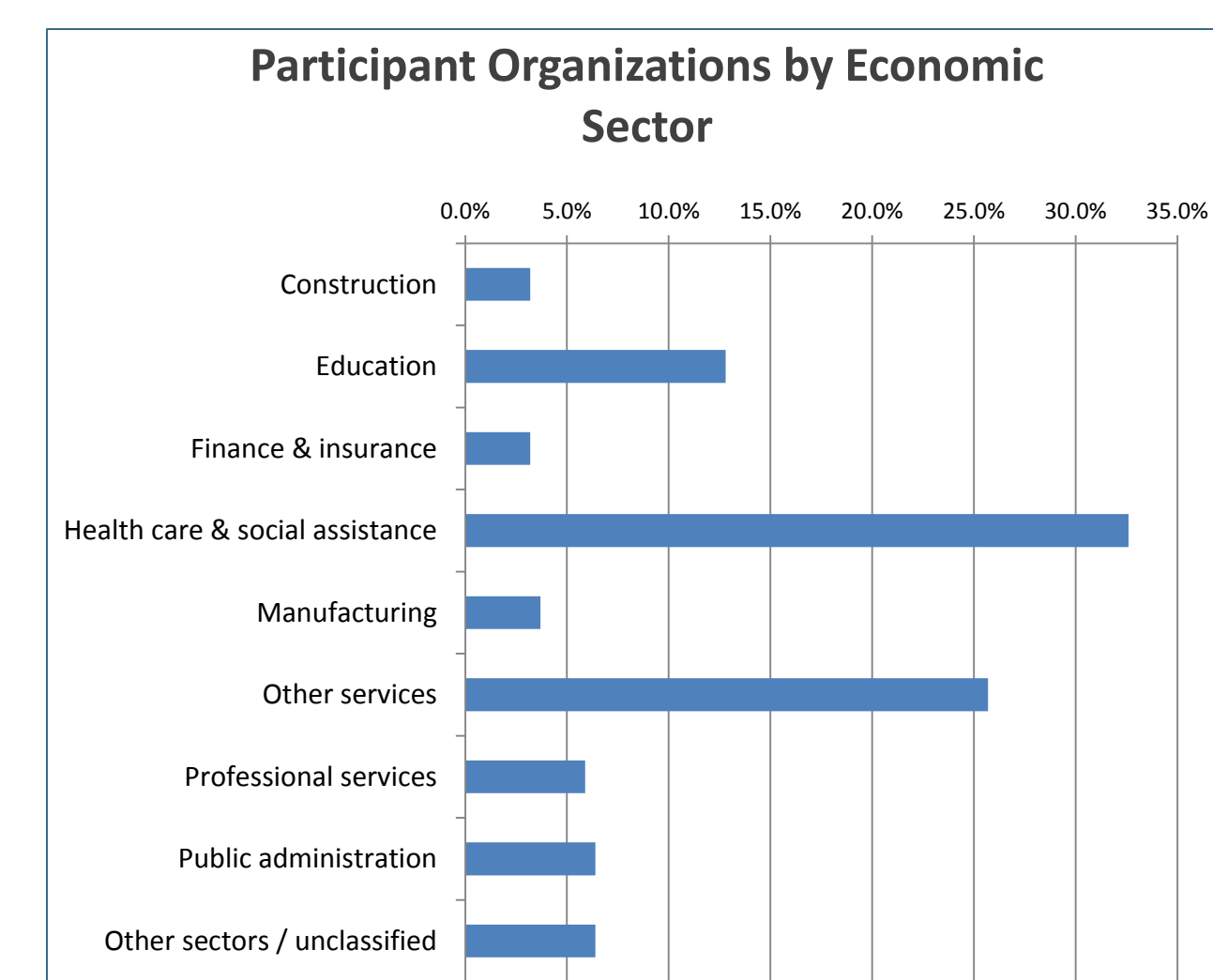
Data Sources and Scoring

- Enrollment application and "on-boarding" form: Organizational and workforce characteristics
 - Composite scores were computed for 9 WHP program elements (1=no element, 2=partially in place, 3=fully established)
- Environmental scan: Baseline health-related policies and programs
 - Policies and workplace facilities were scored in 7 different domains
- Action Plans: Wellness intervention activities planned by employers were compiled and summarized by topic

RESULTS (1)

A total of 205 organizations enrolled initially, in 4 cohorts

- About 54% had ≤ 200 employees
- Non-profits predominated (61%) over private, public sector



Most organizations were in Healthcare & Social Assistance, Other Services, and Education.

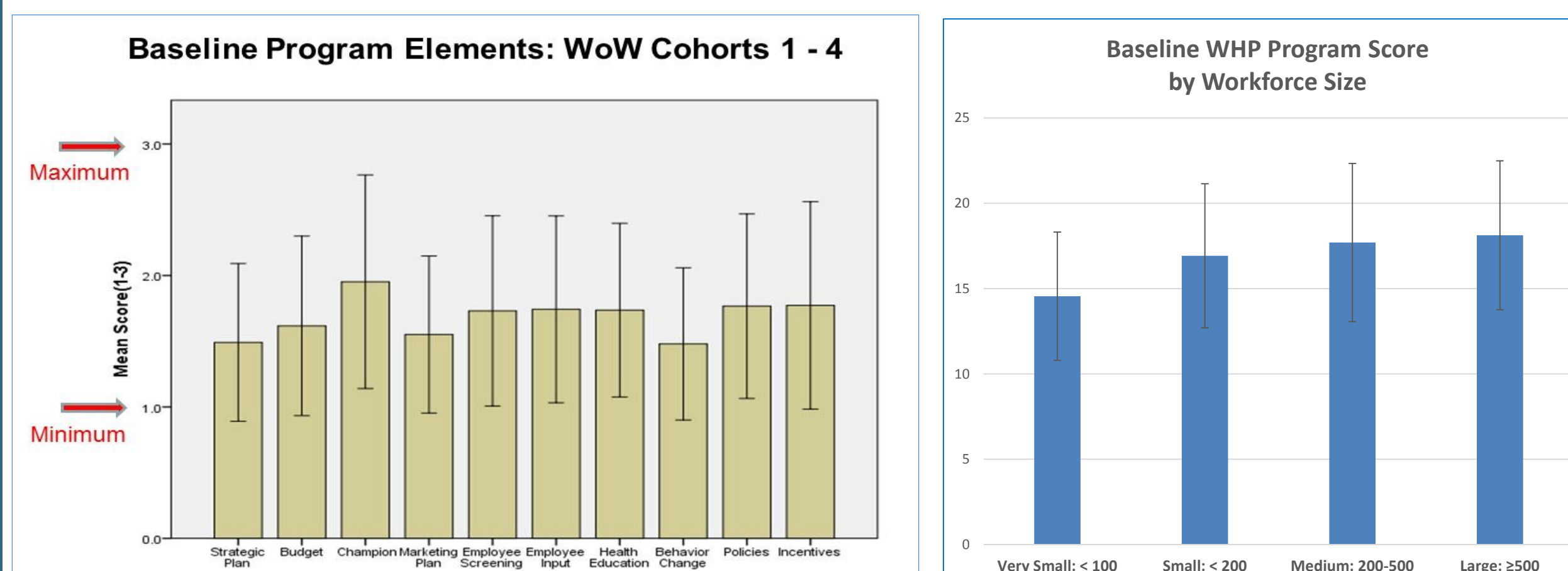
Healthcare organizations were larger (78% > 200 workers) than other sectors, as were public sector workplaces (72% > 200).

Notably under-represented sectors were Construction, Professional & Technical Services, Retail and Wholesale Trade.

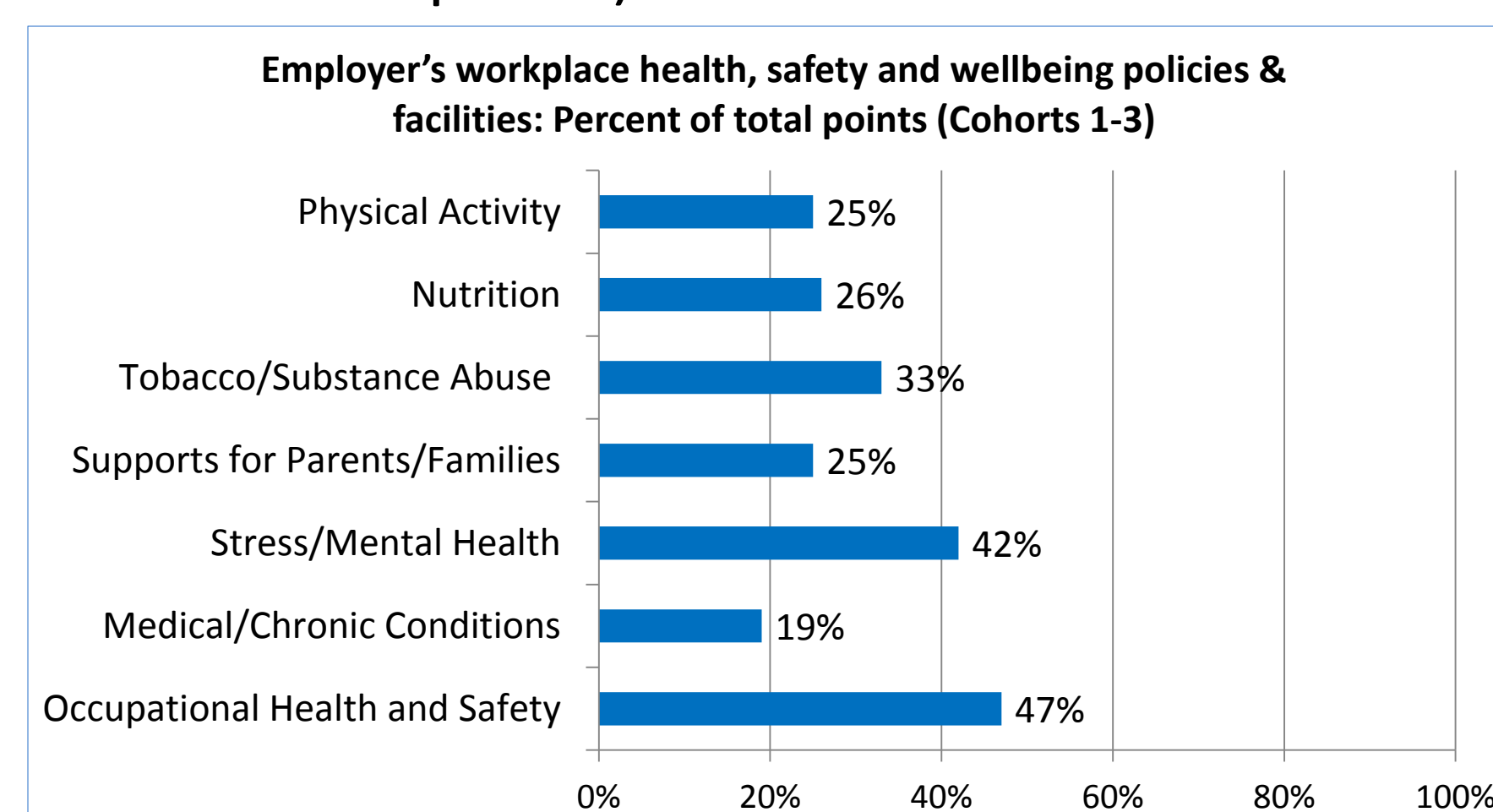
RESULTS (2)

Baseline supports for worker health and safety

- Active, well-managed safety programs were more often reported by employers with over 200 workers (76%) than smaller ones (58%)
- About one-half of participating organizations offered no formal wellness program, especially true of smaller employers.
- Even though some did have WHP programs, few policy or environmental supports were in place to encourage or support healthy behaviors.
- The composite score of the 9 elements showed a slight upward trend by size of organization



Most organizations had at least some baseline policies and facilities in each of the seven surveyed domains or content areas. Of these, occupational health and safety is the only one with legal mandates (for some but not all workplaces).



Input on the needs and interests of their own employees appeared useful in guiding employer decisions about what activities to initiate.

Alignment of employer wellness programming with employee needs and interests

| | Activities "I am likely to participate in..." | Policies and environmental supports "I am very interested in..." | "I am ready to make changes" | Employers selected program targets |
|----------------------|---|--|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Healthy eating | 45% | 58% | 37% | 74% |
| Exercise | 63% | 68% | 38% | 94% |
| Stress reduction | 57% | 61% | 46% | 68% |
| Workplace ergonomics | 32% | ----- | ----- | 16% |

RESULTS (3)

Most frequent employer activities (Cohorts 1-3)

| Physical Activity | | Nutrition | | Stress Reduction | |
|-------------------|---|-----------|---|------------------|--|
| Freq | Intervention | Freq | Intervention | Freq | Intervention |
| 25 | On-site yoga/general fitness classes | 21 | Workshop on nutrition and healthy eating | 20 | Yoga classes |
| 21 | Walking Club | 15 | Organizational policy on food at meetings | 13 | Stress management, coping skills (trainings, demos, and/or practice) |
| 19 | Personal health coaching, fitness education, seminars | 12 | Healthier options in vending machines | 11 | Meditation/mindfulness classes |

Employer activities focused mostly on training and individual behavior change. The main exception was in the area of providing healthier food on site. Primary prevention of job stress is feasible but unusual (also in the literature).

DISCUSSION

Employer organizations are self-selected into WoW. Program participants are not likely representative of all MA employers, and generalizability to other organizations may be limited.

Some sectors present more difficult settings for WHP activities. Construction work is usually outside and without a fixed workplace; workers do not stay for long periods at a given site or with a specific employer. Wholesale trade often involves night shift work.

Employer representatives may have **different perceptions of the work environment and workplace programs** than do individual employees. Resources did not permit data triangulation among respondent groups.

CONCLUSIONS

- The WoW program was successful in recruiting smaller employer organizations, as intended.
- The program also succeeded in reaching organizations that previously had no or little formal wellness programming and few wellness policies or supportive environments, and which likely were in need of technical assistance.
- Organizational change seems to be more difficult to envision and to carry out, perhaps especially when there is no prior WHP experience.

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Evaluation Team members: Laura Punnett, ScD; Wen-Chieh Lin, PhD; Suzanne Nobrega, MS; Kevin Kane, MS; Laura Sefton, MPP; Robin Toof, EdD; Melissa Wall, MA; Wenjun Li, PhD