

Delivering Better Health and Driving Cost Savings:

A Total-Person Approach to Diabetes Prevention and Wellbeing Solutions for Professional Truck Drivers

The U.S. government recently passed a massive bipartisan infrastructure deal that includes significant funding to modernize the country's highways. While repairing the nation's bridges and highways is necessary to improve safety on the road, these critical investments alone are not sufficient to achieve safer road conditions. Equal focus needs to be placed on the health and wellbeing of the American professional truck drivers utilizing these roads—the largest occupational workforce in the U.S., with over 7.4 million jobs tied to the industry.ⁱ By improving the health and safety of your drivers, you not only ensure their protection, but you can also reduce costs associated with accidents, claim payouts, and rises in insurance premiums.

This is no easy task. The very nature of the job puts a physical and mental strain on its workforce: the environment offers minimal opportunities for physical activity, exacerbates poor eating habits, increases the likelihood of stress, fatigue, and loneliness that can trigger substance use. A study from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health found that the prevalence of obesity among truck drivers is more than two times higher than among the general working population of the United States.ⁱⁱ

Obesity increases the risk of road accidents, and is associated with a crash rate that is more than double that of non-obese drivers.ⁱⁱⁱ

It also contributes to annual health care costs that are over 70% higher than for normal-weight drivers.^{iv} Worse still, in the U.S., about 9.4% of the population has diabetes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but for truckers, that number is 14%. Why does this occupational workforce suffer from diabetes at a rate almost 50% higher than the rest of the American population? It's due to the very nature of their jobs.

Diabetes in the population:



About **14%** of the U.S. trucker population has diabetes

About **9.4%** of the U.S. population has diabetes



Driver Lifestyle and Health Challenges

The work of a professional truck driver takes place in a range of non-office settings—the truck cab, highway rest areas, warehouses—each of which feature a shortage of healthy food options and opportunities for physical exercise. In addition to having rates of obesity and diabetes at nearly twice the national level, truck drivers are shown to have high levels of physical inactivity, sedentary behavior, and insufficient nutritional intake.^v These factors may contribute to elevated rates of hypertension, high cholesterol, and high blood glucose seen in the truck driver population.^{vi}

Beyond a challenging environment for maintaining proper diet and exercise, these non-office settings are relatively lacking in opportunities for human interaction and engagement. Truck drivers are often expected to spend days or weeks at a time away from family and friends. As a result, social isolation is common in this occupation, contributing to diminished health, including loneliness and depression. While away, drivers find themselves sleeping at rest areas, truck stops, or alone in roadside motels.

The occupational stress resulting from persistent delivery-related time pressures and the limited social support felt by truck drivers working in isolation contribute to significant psychological stress and sleep deprivation levels.^{vii}

Stimulants, alcohol, and drugs (both illicit and prescribed) are often used as coping mechanisms; binge drinking behavior is reported in almost 20% of truck drivers,^{viii} and the population is two times more likely to smoke cigarettes than the average U.S. adult.^{ix}

By themselves, these adverse lifestyle behaviors and health conditions pose serious health risks and expenses, but they also represent risk factors for developing serious chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and its precursor, prediabetes.

The Cost of Diabetes

Over 84 million Americans have prediabetes, defined as higher-than-normal blood glucose that is not sufficiently high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes, but which raises their short-term absolute risk of developing type 2 diabetes by five- to sixfold.^x The cost of diabetes care is enormous: the average annual medical expense for a diabetic is over \$16,750—more than twice the amount for an individual without diabetes.^{xi}

Average cost of healthcare:



In the professional truck driving population, approximately one-third of commercial motor vehicle drivers have been diagnosed with diabetes, and an additional one-third of drivers are symptomatic of prediabetes.^{xii} Like other chronic diseases, these conditions impact a driver's health and ability to continue in the profession safely. As drivers need to regularly pass medical examinations in order to keep their commercial driver's license (CDL), maintaining a healthy weight and blood glucose levels becomes even more critical.

The Business Impact on Fleets

The health, financial, and professional consequences that stem from these issues only stand to compound the challenges fleets face in recruiting and retaining talent. Even though truck drivers in the commercial transportation industry constitute one of the largest occupational groups in the U.S., the potential labor pool is constrained by an aging workforce, driver shortages, and high turnover rates.

Over half the current driver population is comprised of white men between the ages of 35 and 54, a demographic group that will shrink by approximately



3 million individuals over the next decade.^{xiii} Furthermore, the growth rate of the country's labor force as a whole is projected to fall from 1.4% per year to .5% per year over this same period.^{xiv}

Life expectancies of truck drivers are estimated to be 16 years shorter than that of the average American worker, and health issues can accelerate a path to involuntary retirement if drivers cannot meet the physical requirements necessary to maintain their CDL.^{xv}

In 2017, there were 98,000 fewer drivers than available job opportunities, and this shortage is projected to balloon to 160,000 drivers by 2028.^{xvi} With driver demand significantly outpacing driver supply, fleets find themselves in fierce competition with one another to offer increasingly generous compensation packages in the hope of attracting drivers. Average starting bonuses have increased by almost 20% in recent years, but driver turnover continues to plague the industry.^{xvii} Nearly 40% of new drivers quit within their first 90 days, and the driver turnover rate in the fall of 2020 was found to be 74% and 92% for small and large fleets, respectively.^{xviii}

The turnover-associated expenses facing fleets are considerable. The average cost of driver turnover is estimated to be between \$8,200 and \$11,500 per driver, which includes recruitment advertising expenses, idle equipment costs, lost profit, drug testing, background checks, and new hire orientation.^{xix} The Department of Labor has estimated that the combination of labor turnover and absenteeism represents approximately 25 percent of a trucking company's total budget for the year.^{xx}

Poor truck driver health has a direct impact on a range of important metrics—healthcare-related costs, productivity, and road safety for both truck drivers and the motoring public more generally—underscoring the importance for fleets of all sizes to promote the health and wellbeing of their employees. The question becomes—how best to overcome the profession's inherent barriers to health and achieve lasting results for America's professional drivers?

Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Intervention Through Lifestyle Change

While efforts to combat the crisis of chronic disease in both the truck driver profession specifically and the general population as a whole have not yielded significant progress over the past 30 years,^{xxi, xxii} several organizations are leading the charge to make improved health more attainable. Within the trucking industry, trade organizations like the American Trucking Association (ATA) have shone a spotlight on the importance of driver health and made resources available for professional fleets and their drivers to achieve these goals. In society more broadly, the advent of the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has the potential to make the biggest impact in improving health and reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.

The National DPP lifestyle change program is an evidence-based program focused on helping participants make positive lifestyle changes such as eating healthier, reducing stress, and getting more physical activity. The National DPP is a year-long program that encourages realistic lifestyle changes to prevent type 2 diabetes through diet and exercise, and it was developed based on a number of studies demonstrating that a 5-7% reduction in bodyweight can help lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58% in adults with prediabetes.^{xiii}

Weight reduction

5-7%

reduction in bodyweight can help lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by

58%



Making meaningful modifications to lifestyle behaviors can be difficult in a modern, fast-paced world where professional and personal commitments leave little time for recreational exercise and in which the dietary landscape is dominated by highly processed, high sugar, high-calorie items. It becomes even more of a challenge for hard-to-reach, medically underserved employee populations like professional truck drivers, whose lives on the road may lack the support structures and scheduling consistency that provide a foundation from which to make enduring change.

How WellSpark Designed a Custom-Tailored Solution to Work with Drivers

Traditional disease prevention benefit strategies and standard off-the-shelf point solutions have historically been created with office-based employees in mind and often fail to generate results for a largely disparate labor force of lone drivers working on the road.^{xxiv} WellSpark's Occupational Diabetes Prevention Program is one-of-a-kind in its approach to engaging participants. Using its CDC-certified digital DPP as a foundation, WellSpark has customized a program that accounts for the lifestyle, demands, needs, and personal experiences of the transportation industry workforce—from truck drivers, office staff and diesel technicians, to warehouse personnel safety managers and more.

WellSpark's comprehensive disease prevention solution is a 12-month live and on-demand, lifestyle change program that combines behavioral science with personalized support to help participants build healthy habits that can last a lifetime. To assist in raising awareness of the DPP offering within your fleet and helping interested parties register, our team is available to guide individuals through every step of the eligibility and enrollment process. The program includes an introductory "Session 0," followed by 26 additional sessions and concludes with a celebratory "Maintenance Session." A range of digital media—including on-demand video and podcasts—enables participants to learn strategies tailored to the needs of professional truck drivers and allows them to take part in knowledge checks, challenges, and quizzes that reinforce what they've learned. Participants gain true-to-life, practical tools and skills that drive the modest weight loss

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An introductory Session 0



Followed by 26 live and on-demand sessions



Concludes with a celebratory Maintenance Session

A range of digital media



On-demand video



Podcasts

Participants learn strategies tailored to professional truck drivers and take part in knowledge checks, challenges, and quizzes to reinforce what they've learned.

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Importantly, drivers can access program materials wherever they are—whether on the road, at a truck stop, or at home—keeping safety and on-time delivery top of mind. Drivers can access live sessions online with certified instructors in a group-based learning model or participate in on-demand make-up sessions with regional time zone accommodations. Participants are matched into peer groups for encouragement and healthy competition, with goal-setting tools and a community message board to foster further engagement and peer connection. All of this leads to long-term behavior modification and improved lifestyle within their personal and professional worlds.



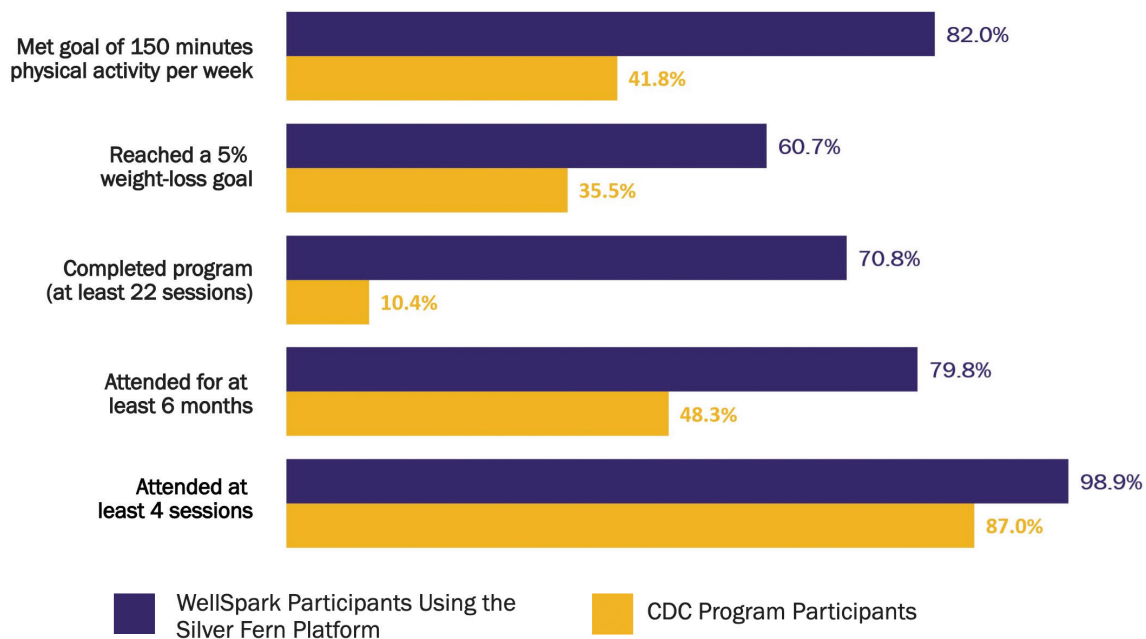
What further sets WellSpark’s Digital DPP apart is personalization and individual engagement. WellSpark has Certified Diabetes Educators and Health Coaches on staff who take the time to get to know each participant and develop customized strategies that reflect drivers’ lifestyles and unique environments. These health educators and coaches form real relationships, one driver at a time, to generate camaraderie and foster a sense of accountability among the driver population. This differentiator provides individuals the emotional support necessary to stay on the right path to better health, and it is particularly important given drivers’ common experiences of social isolation while on the job. Conversely, it is precisely this human connection that is lacking in similar sounding offerings that rely solely on digital interactions to generate trust and commitment on the part of the participant. It is the emotional support that helps.

In sum, WellSpark’s approach to driver wellbeing helps participants build healthy habits that can last a lifetime, which translates into meaningful results: WellSpark’s DPP has been recognized as exceeding national averages of traditional CDC Programs for hard-to-reach professions across a range of important metrics, including increased physical activity, average weight loss, and reduced A1c levels. Participants also experienced a decline in both blood pressure and cholesterol.

Working with WellSpark, fleets are positioned to tackle prediabetes as part of a larger strategy to promote driver wellbeing and provide actionable solutions to the unique health challenges and related costs facing the transportation industry. WellSpark is dedicated to improving the health and wellness of the transportation industry—one fleet and one driver at a time—for the long-haul.

Exceed national averages of the traditional CDC programs^{xxv, xxvi}

WellSpark’s DPP vs. CDC’s PreventT2





WellSparkSM

End Notes:

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