



Implementing employee wellness activities to mitigate burnout and improve employee morale and retention of public health workers during COVID-19

CHEAC Annual Meeting
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Photo: Two health department staff support one another after a mass vaccination clinic by standing with their arms around one another's shoulders

Tuolumne County Public Health



Photo: TCPH COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic stations

- Tuolumne County is a rural county in the east central portion of the state in the land of the Central Sierra MiWok tribe.
- Population: 55,810 ([census.gov](https://www.census.gov))



- Tuolumne County Public Health Department (TCPH) is a rural county health department located in Sonora, California.
- The department currently employs 45 staff and operates over 40 health and safety programs and grants.
- TCPH's COVID-19 Department Operations Center (DOC) was activated in February 2020 with the County reporting its first COVID-19 case in April 2020. Similar to many health departments, staff were pulled from regular programming to work in the DOC and respond to the health emergency.

Public Health Workers During COVID-19

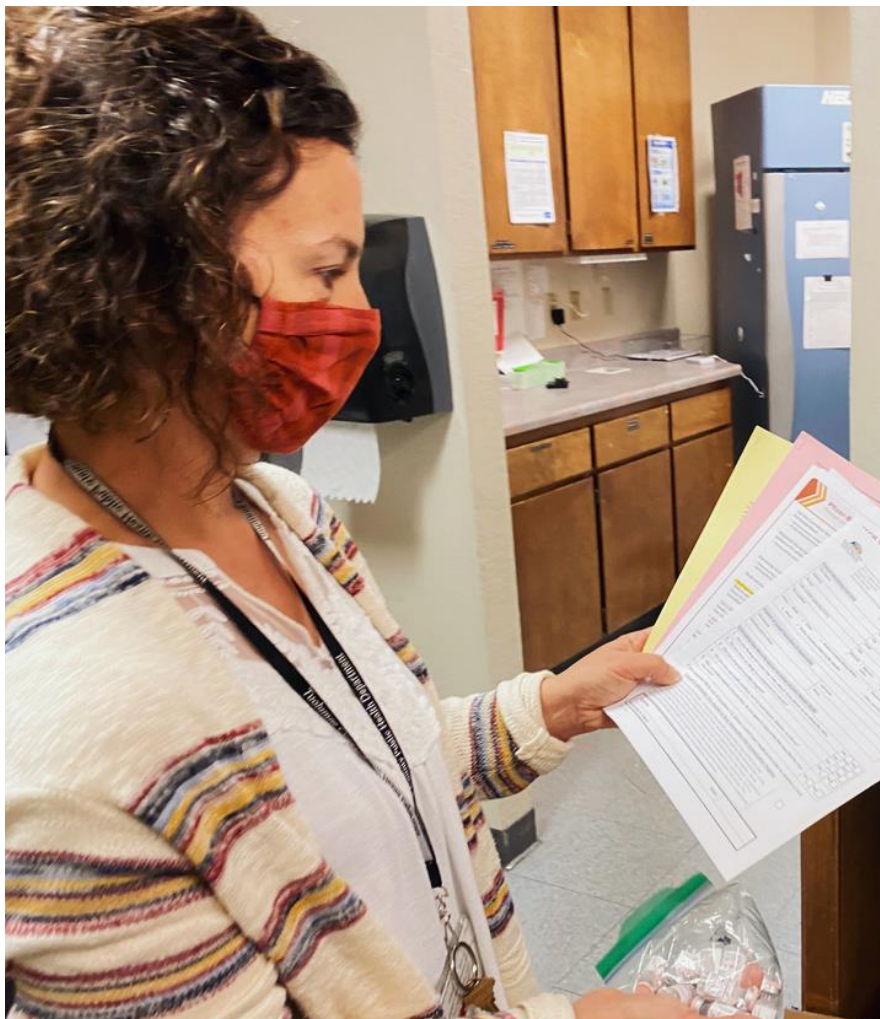


Photo: ATCPH employee organizes vaccine vials and forms



Photo: TCPH employees & volunteers pose for a photo at a vaccine clinic during inclement weather

- [A 2021 CDC survey](#) found that 53% of public health workers reported at least one adverse mental health condition in the preceding two weeks.
- Per the [World Health Organization](#): burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.
- [PH WINS data](#) found that nearly 1 in 3 public health employees say they are considering leaving their organization within the next year.
- Similar to other rural areas in the state, Tuolumne County faced a large amount of public resistance to COVID-19 precautions and policies. The controversial nature of the pandemic, exacerbated by rural challenges, resulted in staff working in a constantly stressful environment.

TCPH FUN Committee

- Established in 2013 with the goal of offering opportunities for employees to have fun together!
- In a 2019 County of Tuolumne workforce survey, TCPH reported higher levels of morale (3.75) than the countywide average (3.18).
- Multi-dimensional workplace wellness and socialization activities during COVID-19 operations offered opportunities for improving employee health outcomes and mitigating burnout by increasing social connectedness, morale, positive resiliency, and health behaviors.

Mission

Expand and support opportunities that improve health & morale amongst Public Health Staff

Vision

Happy, healthy, & engaged staff

Values

Community, teamwork, fun, growth, happiness, & humor



Photo: TCPH employees dress up in fruit and veggie costumes as part of a FUN Committee activity

FUN Committee Goals

- **Cultivate an environment we want to work in and invite others to share the experience.**
 - May influence retention and engagement
- **Promote workplace wellness to increase productivity, lower turnover, and reduce absenteeism.**
 - Happy, engaged people will better serve the department's mission
- **Provide opportunities for employees to interact outside of typical tasks to facilitate support.**
 - [Sense of support can reduce job-related stress](#)
 - Positive co-worker relationships influence morale and resiliency

FUN COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK



- **CONNECTEDNESS**
 - Building community amongst Public Health employees
 - Peer led & run activities
- **HEALTH & WELLNESS**
 - Encouraging workplace wellness and offering activities/resources focusing on health and wellbeing
- **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**
 - Offering opportunities to learn and grow

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.



- [U.S. Surgeon General Framework for "Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being"](#) was released on October 20, 2022.
- There is increasing focus on the prevalent rates of burnout and decreased mental health amongst public health and health workforce and emerging efforts to address these issues and provide support
- If using the U.S. Surgeon General Framework, the FUN Committee is a potential tool that can support overall workforce well-being in the areas of Connection & Community and Mattering at Work

STRUCTURE



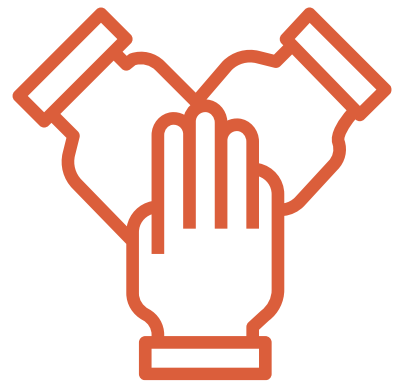
- **Participation**

- All staff are invited to participate
- All activities are voluntary/optional
- Activities occur during breaks, lunch, or outside of work



- **Funding**

- Activities are funded by staff donations (materials or monetary) and a shared, internal tracking system is kept
- Periodic internal fundraisers



- **Collaboration**

- All staff are encouraged to share ideas or help plan and set-up activities

Connectedness Activities

- Celebrating staff milestones
- Potlucks & snack days
- Holiday & non-holiday celebrations
- Themed / spirit days
- Fun contests
- Secret Pal
- Kudos box

Adapting During COVID:

How did we maintain connectedness during a time when isolation and maintaining distance from others were some of the main COVID-19 safety policies?

- Virtual or solo scavenger hunts
- Easter egg hunts in personal workstations
- Distanced activity stations
- Take to your desk activities - coloring pages, etc
- Move activities outside and distanced - tie dye masks
- Sharing work from home views/pet "co-workers"



Photo: Three staff pose with certificates after a video game competition



Photo: Dozens of tie-dye masks hang on a wood pallet to dry after an outdoor mask dying event in 2020

Health & Wellness Activities

- Annual Wellness Challenge
 - focused on multiple dimensions of health: exercise, nutrition/hydration, mental/emotional health, and social/intellectual health
 - Participation in APHA Get Moving challenges
- Community office garden
- Hiking Club
- Employee led breaktime movement activities
- Healthy snack days & prizes & salad potlucks
- Coloring page wall to promote mindfulness and breaks
- Safe, quiet space to decompress on stressful COVID-19 response days
- Blue Zones Approved Worksite in 2024
- Wellness Room developed in 2024



Above: A self-care wall includes affirmation cards, bubble wrap, and a worry monster box.



*Above: Salad potluck ingredients are spread over three tables.
Left: A smiling staff member holds a Workplace Wellness Challenge prize of strawberries in a cup.*

Health & Wellness Activities



**Public Health Staff
Wellness Room
developed in 2024**



Above: Wellness Room cot corner features soft lighting, speaker to stream meditation videos or music, air purifier, and white noise machine. Right: Wellness Room features a lounge chair and various activities such as journaling and coloring pages, puzzles, books, blood pressure monitor, sensory items, and the EAP program information.



Personal Development Activities

- Book club, book exchanges, lending library
- Blue Zones activities
- Lunch & Learns
 - Financial planning, cooking demos, professional organizer guest speaker, canning, essential oils, lavender bundles, nutrition
 - CHP texting and driving presentation
 - Future plans: partner organization presentations on self-care, etc.



Photo (left): employees making empanadas during the a lunch and learn event.

Photo (right): a sample Lunch and Learn flyer

Empanada
Lunch & Learn
May 11th || 12-1pm
Learn to make empanadas!



Taught by Elizabeth



More Examples

Evaluation

- **Evaluation of the program is ongoing and gathered via:**
 - Monthly meetings with employees
 - Annual "stay" interviews
 - Suggestions box
 - Abbreviated FUN Committee Survey completed in early 2022
 - Q12 Gallup Employee Engagement Survey
- **In progress as of 2024 - analysis of Q12 Gallup engagement survey, exit interviews, stay interviews of staff to determine if department wellness efforts have impacted:**
 - job satisfaction
 - turnover intentions
 - health behaviors
 - employee engagement post-COVID-19 response
 - level of employee burnout
 - support and resources received or needed
 - other long-term impacts

Preliminary Results

- Between 2020-2022, PHD staffing doubled from approximately 25 to 50, with no known departures attributed to COVID-19 burnout.
- Qualitative data garnered from stay interviews indicate that the wellness program reduced feelings of isolation amongst employees during emergency response.
- In 2022, the County administered a Staff Recruitment and Retention Survey which found that employees want more social & teambuilding activities (such as county team sporting leagues, walking groups) and health, wellness, & self-care opportunities.
- Q12 Engagement Survey results (N=41):
 - overall department engagement mean was 4.24
 - mean of 4.41 when asked, "Someone at work cares about me"
 - mean of 4.38 when asked "Someone at my work encourages my development"
 - mean of 4.38 when asked "this last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow"
 - mean of 4.22 when asked "how satisfied are you with your agency as a place to work"

Preliminary Results

- Qualitative data gathered during stay interviews and the abbreviated survey include:

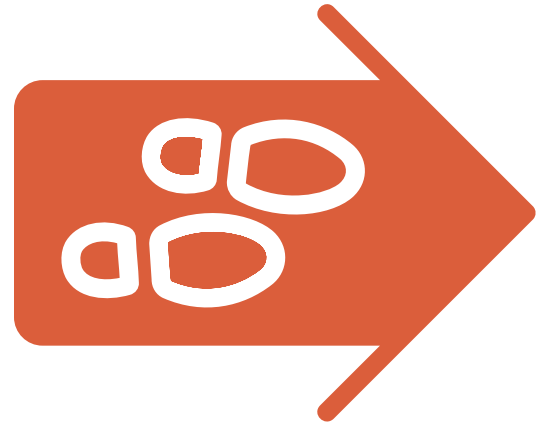
FUN Committee activities make it fun to come to work. The activities are diverse and always boost morale!

FUN Committee makes work fun!! I feel part of a community/family and I think a lot of that is because of the Fun Committee.

Get to meet and mingle with people in the department that I don't typically get to talk to.

The Fun committee breaks up the daily work routine.

Next Steps & Key Takeaways



Future of PH FUN Committee

- Continued evaluation
- Exploring sustainable funding sources
- Implementation of new activities based on evaluation results, specifically on building upon connectedness and improving on employee recognition
- Participate in PHWINS 2024 survey



How to Get Started in Your Organization

- Assess staff readiness and office culture
- Start small by offering a variety of simple activities
- Get interested people together to form a committee

***"Don't forget
to have FUN."***

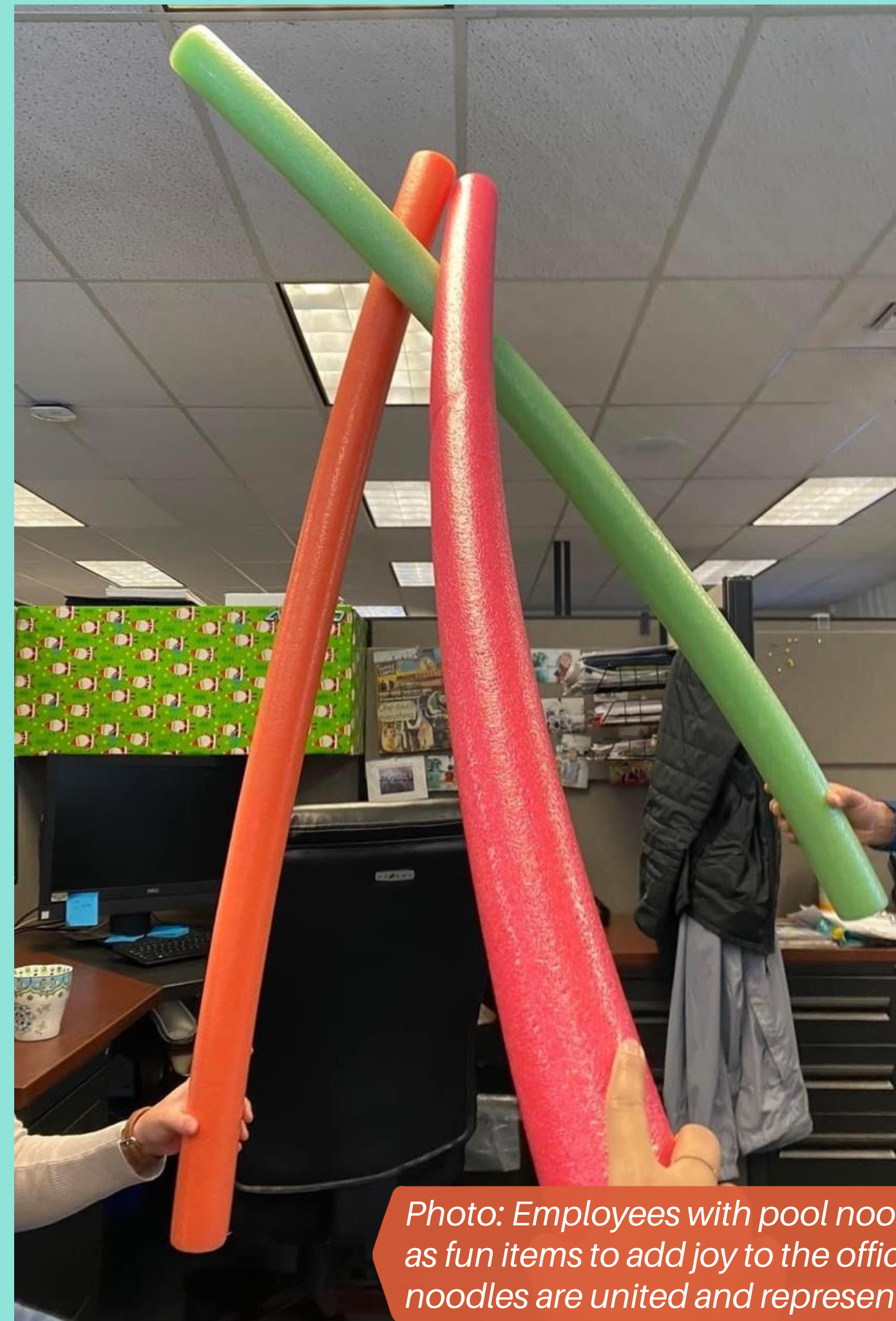


Photo: Employees with pool noodles that were used as fun items to add joy to the office. Here the pool noodles are united and represents teamwork.



TUOLUMNE COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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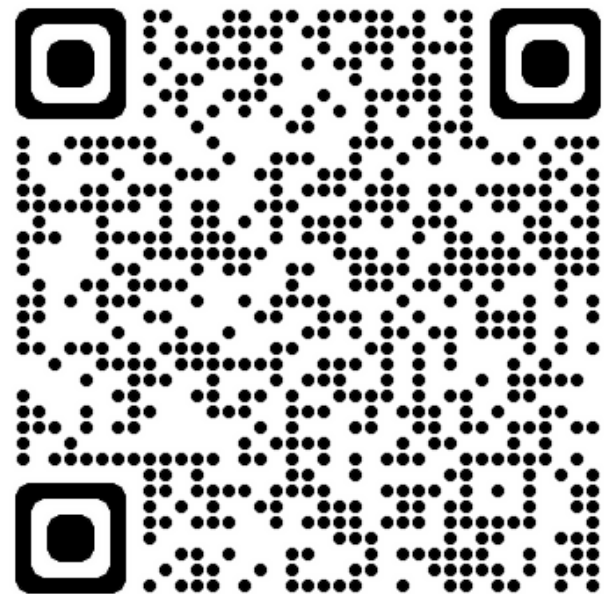


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SCAN



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