

Emerging Benefits: Access to Health Promotion Benefits in the United States, Private Industry, 1999 and 2005

by [Eli Stoltzfus](#)

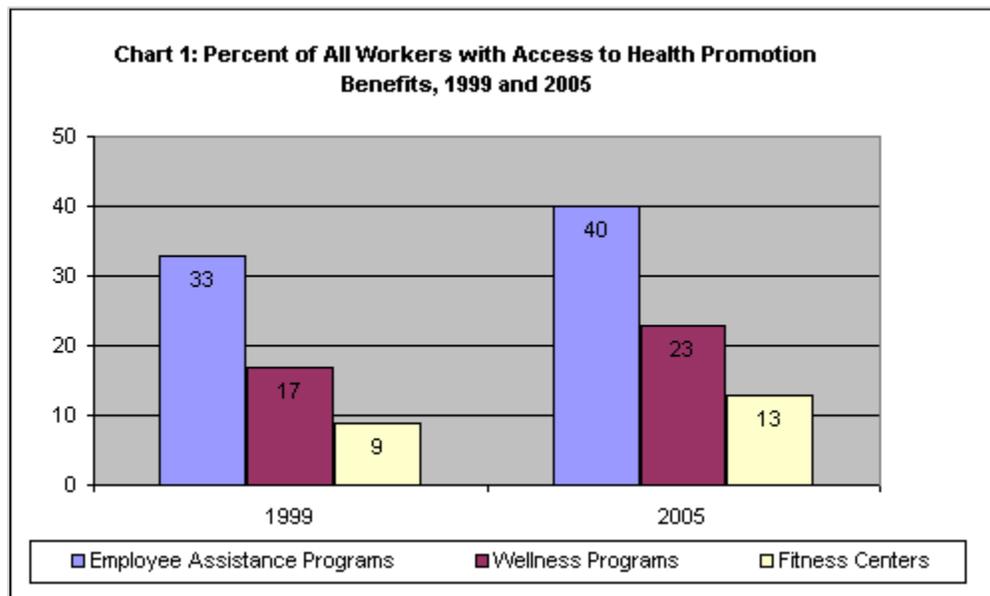
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Originally Posted: July 26, 2006

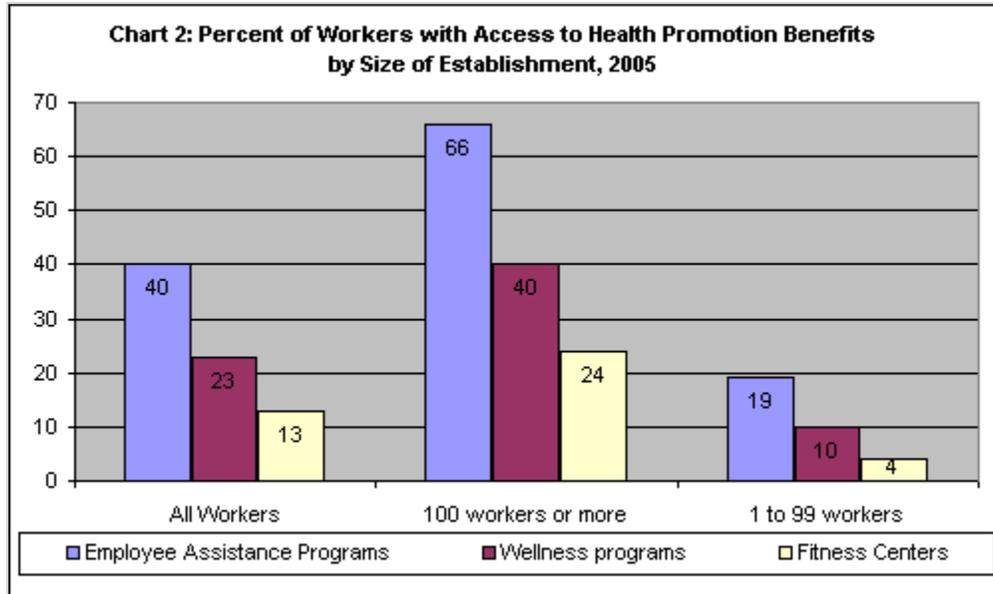
In a 1988 article in the *Monthly Labor Review*, Janet L. Norwood, who was Commissioner of Labor Statistics at the time, wrote, "New benefits are emerging in response to changing demographic and social patterns."¹ Norwood further explained that economic and social changes result in changes to employer-provided benefits and that over time, new benefits emerge and become more prominent in the workplace.

The [National Compensation Survey \(NCS\)](#) collects and publishes data on the prevalence of a number of emerging benefits, including *health promotion benefits*. In recent years, concern for preventive healthcare measures, such as smoking cessation and a more active lifestyle, has given rise to greater employee access to health promotion benefits.²

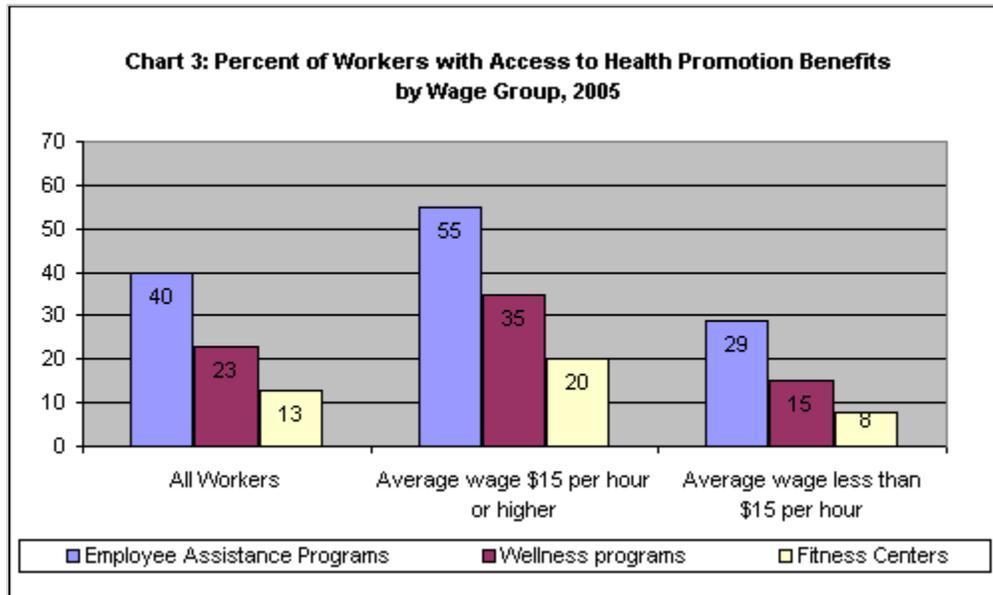
This chart presentation shows the increase in employee access rates to employer provided health-promotion benefits in the United States from 1999 to 2005. It also shows the 2005 access rates for selected groups of employees for three health promotion benefits: employee assistance programs, wellness programs, and fitness centers. *Employee assistance programs* provide employees with access to referral or counseling services for problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, and financial and legal difficulties. *Wellness programs* provide employees with help in areas such as stress management, nutrition education, and smoking cessation. *Fitness centers* include company onsite fitness facilities or employer subsidized fitness or health club membership fees for employees.



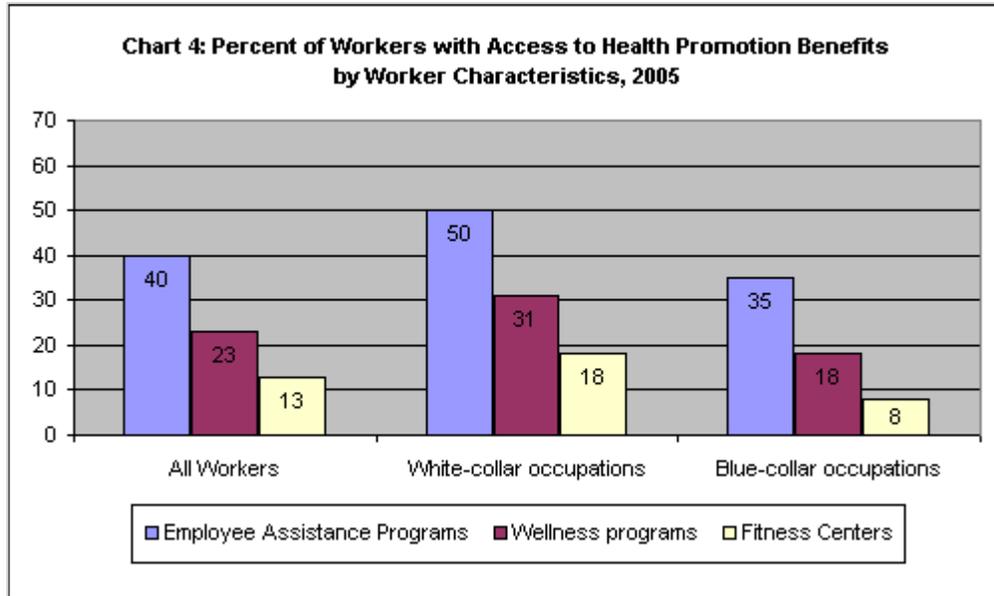
- As chart 1 shows, from 1999 to 2005, employee access to employer-provided health promotion benefits for all worker groups showed a marked increase: access to employee assistance programs increased from 33 to 40 percent, access to wellness programs increased from 17 to 23 percent, and access to fitness centers increased from 9 to 13 percent.
- In 2005, the most prevalent health promotion benefit was employee assistance programs. Wellness programs were less prevalent, and the least prevalent benefit was fitness centers. This pattern holds true for all worker groups; however, as can be seen in charts 2-5, among different worker groups, the rate of access varied widely.



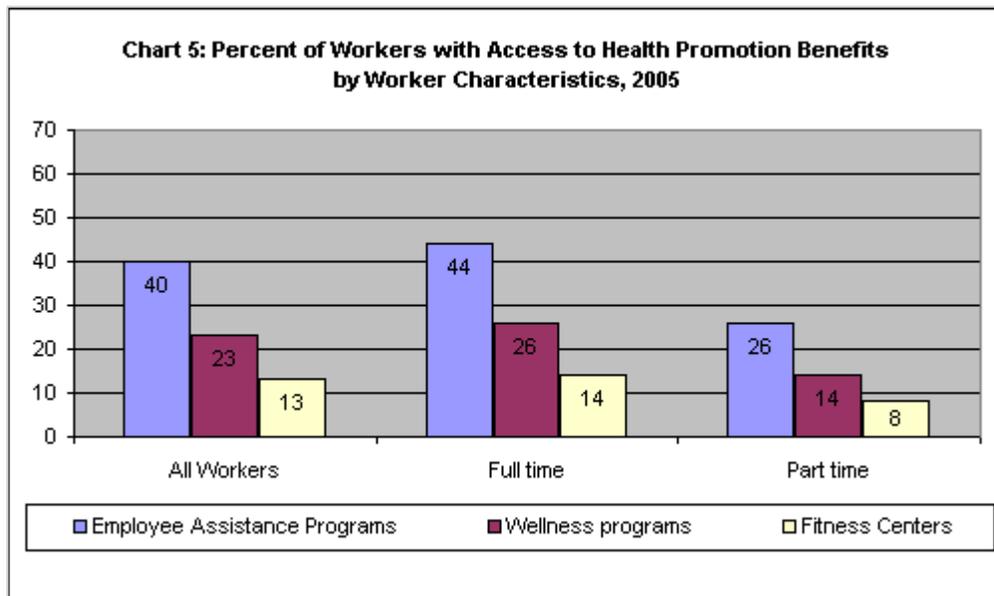
- Chart 2 shows that employees who worked in establishments with 100 or more employees had the highest access rates for each of the three health promotion benefits--employee assistance programs, wellness programs, and fitness centers--of any NCS-published worker group, while employees that worked in establishments with less than 100 employees had the lowest.



- Chart 3 shows that workers who earn \$15 or more per hour had access to health promotion benefits at about twice the rate of workers earning less than \$15 per hour.



- Chart 4 shows that white-collar workers were more likely to have access to health promotion benefits than blue-collar workers.³



- Chart 5 shows that access rates for full-time occupations are close to the average for all workers. While part-time workers have lower rates of access to health promotion benefits than full-time workers, they make up only 23 percent of private industry workers.⁴

The factors that determine the percent of workers who have access to health promotion benefits in the occupational and establishment categories shown above are somewhat overlapping. For example, workers in private industry earn, on average, higher wages in larger establishments than do those in smaller establishments, and white-collar workers earn more, on average, than blue-collar workers.⁵

NOTE: Standard errors have not been calculated for NCS benefits estimates. Consequently, none of the statistical inferences made in this report could be verified by a statistical test.

Eli Stoltzfus
 Economist, Division of National Compensation Survey, Office of Field Operations, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
 Telephone: (202) 691-6506; E-mail: Stoltzfus.Eli@bls.gov

Notes

1 Janet L. Norwood, "Measuring the Cost and Incidence of Employee Benefits," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1988, pp. 3-8; quote, p. 6; on the Internet at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1988/08/art1full.pdf>.

2 As defined by the National Compensation Survey, an employee has access to a benefit plan if the employee is in an occupation that is offered the plan. By definition, either all employees in an occupation have access to a benefit or none has access.

3 White-collar occupations include professional, technical, administrative, and sales occupations. For more information, see: [National Compensation Survey: Occupational Wages in the United States, July 2004](#), Bulletin 2576 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2005), Appendix B, on the Internet at: <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ocs/sp/ncbl0757.pdf>.

4 See "National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2005," Summary 05-01, (Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2005), Technical Note, p. 32, on the Internet at: <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/sp/ebsm0003.pdf>.

5 [National Compensation Survey: Occupational Wages in the United States, July 2004](#), Bulletin 2576 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2005), table 2-2, pp. 16-24, on the Internet at: <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ocs/sp/ncbl0757.pdf>.

Data for Chart 1. Percent of All Workers with Access to Health Promotion Benefits, 1999 and 2005

	1999	2005
Employee Assistance Programs	33	40
Wellness Programs	17	23
Fitness Centers	9	13

Data for Chart 2. Percent of Workers with Access to Health Promotion Benefits by Size of Establishment, 2005

Characteristics	Employee Assistance Programs	Wellness programs	Fitness Centers
All Workers	40	23	13
100 workers or more	66	40	24
1 to 99 workers	19	10	4

Data for Chart 3. Percent of Workers with Access to Health Promotion Benefits by Wage Group, 2005

Characteristics	Employee Assistance Programs	Wellness programs	Fitness Centers
All Workers	40	23	13
Average wage \$15 per hour or higher	55	35	20
Average wage less than \$15 per hour	29	15	8

Data for Chart 4. Percent of Workers with Access to Health Promotion Benefits by Worker Characteristics, 2005

Characteristics	Employee Assistance Programs	Wellness programs	Fitness Centers
All Workers	40	23	13
White-collar occupations	50	31	18
Blue-collar occupations	35	18	8

Data for Chart 5. Percent of Workers with Access to Health Promotion Benefits by Worker Characteristics, 2005

Characteristics	Employee Assistance Programs	Wellness programs	Fitness Centers
All Workers	40	23	13
Full time	44	26	14
Part time	26	14	8

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