Governor Bobby Jindal and DHH Secretary Kathy Kliebert Announce “Well-Ahead Louisiana” Health Initiative

Statewide campaign aims to improve wellness through voluntary and organizational changes

BATON ROUGE – Today, Governor Bobby Jindal and the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) Secretary Kathy Kliebert were joined by dozens of local supporting organizations to launch the Well-Ahead Louisiana initiative, which will designate healthy places around the state that voluntarily champion and embrace health and wellness. The program is a state-wide effort to partner with schools, businesses and other organizations in local communities to give Louisianians more control and ownership of their health.

Well-Ahead Louisiana, the first voluntary designation program of its kind in the state, encourages organizations and individuals to make small healthy lifestyle changes to the spaces where Louisiana residents spend most of their time. Well-Ahead establishes healthy living designation criteria for organizations to follow that will result in better health outcomes for Louisiana residents. Examples of healthy designation criteria include breastfeeding friendly policies, tobacco-free environments, employee wellness and consistent healthy food offerings. These changes will make smart choices an easier part of living and working in Louisiana.

Governor Jindal said, “Today is a great day for Louisiana. Louisiana is a special place, one with incredible festivals, food and music. We love our way of life here, and I want each and every one of us to be able to live longer, healthier, happier lives so that we can cherish and celebrate our culture for years to come. To help do that, we’ve created the Well-Ahead Louisiana initiative. The largest component of this program is the recognition of businesses, schools and other organizations across our state that are making it easier for our people to make healthier choices. This program is a testament to the fact that we can be healthy without raising taxes or passing burdensome, complicated laws.”

“DHH is very proud to announce our Well-Ahead Louisiana program,” said DHH Secretary Kathy Kliebert. “Approximately 1.6 million or one in three Louisiana residents
are obese. We must raise awareness on how Louisianians can improve their wellbeing. Together we can shape a future for our citizens where we are all able to live longer, better lives because we’ve made the choice to change.”

In 2013, Louisiana spent an estimated $28 billion on the treatment and economic costs of primary chronic diseases, like heart disease, obesity and diabetes. When Louisianans start making healthy decisions for themselves, future economic costs associated with chronic conditions could be reduced by $17.3 billion, coupled with a decrease of 600,000 chronic disease cases. Further, smart and healthy living could add $62 billion to the State’s economic output by 2050.

Employers, schools, health care providers, universities, child care centers and restaurants can choose to seek designation as a Well-Ahead Louisiana location, called a WellSpot. The Well-Ahead designation includes three levels of WellSpots, Level One, Level Two and Level Three. Level One is the highest level and indicates that the highest number of Well-Ahead criteria have been met, followed by Level Two and Level Three. Criteria for each level can be viewed on the program’s website at www.WellAheadLA.com.

Organizations making positive changes may voluntarily request a Well-Ahead team member to verify that it has completed wellness-based changes and may be designated WellSpots in Louisiana. DHH will recognize those WellSpots and the organization will be able to display signage and Well-Ahead campaign material to let Louisiana citizens know it considers wellness to be a priority.

“Louisiana has an incredible food culture, and all of us deserve to enjoy that culture for as long as possible instead of having our lives cut short by chronic disease,” said Public Health Assistant Secretary J.T. Lane. “Environments play a large role in our daily choices. Through Well-Ahead, we can assist organizations, businesses, families and individuals in achieving and maintaining good health. I encourage everyone to familiarize themselves with the Well-Ahead criteria and see what changes they can make to positively impact their life.”

“With the bounty of seafood, protein and produce we have here in our state, we encourage restaurants to take part in the Well-Ahead Louisiana campaign,” said Stan Harris, President and CEO, Louisiana Restaurant Association. “Restaurants can choose to participate in this voluntary program by offering alternative preparation of menu items and providing this information to their service staff to share with their guests.”

“What better time to begin a lifetime of wellness than from the very beginning. Woman’s Hospital delivers more than 8,500 babies a year – thousands of opportunities for healthy beginnings. Our support for Well-Ahead Louisiana’s mission extends from strong breastfeeding initiatives to walking trails and healthy menu options; we want to make healthy, active lifestyles a part of every family, including our own employees,” said Teri Fontenot, Woman’s Hospital President and CEO.
“At RoyOMartin we view employee wellness as a competitive advantage. We believe that a healthy employee is a more productive employee,” said Ray Peters, Vice President of Human Resources and Marketing at RoyOMartin. “Furthermore, improved employee health helps ensure that employer-provided medical coverage can be managed more cost effectively. Seventy-three percent of our employees voluntary participate in on-site wellness programming, and every day we see lives being positively impacted.”

“The University of Louisiana System is happy to support the state’s Well-Ahead initiative. Each of the nine universities in our system has health and wellness programming, and we look forward to partnering with the Department of Health and Hospitals to enhance those efforts on behalf of our 90,000 students,” said UL System President Dr. Sandra Woodley.

“LSU is committed to improving the lives of all Louisianans. At Pennington Biomedical we are interfacing with the entire state through partnerships with the LSU AgCenter to tackle the obesity epidemic head on through our Childhood Obesity and Diabetes Research Program. Combined with awareness efforts like Well-Ahead, we will make an impact,” said Dr. Peter Katzmarzyk, Associate Executive Director for Population and Public Health Sciences at Pennington Biomedical.

"We love our state and the vast food culture it offers. However, Louisiana has one of the highest chronic disease rates in the country. We must change our dialogue on health to focus on how we can proactively be well," said Louisiana Sen. David Heitmeier. “I believe Well-Ahead WellSpots will show Louisianans how we can make smart and healthy choices to enhance our wellbeing. Knowledge is key to ensuring Louisiana residents are happier and healthier to enjoy our unique lifestyle."

Organizations interested in becoming a WellSpot can visit www.WellAheadLA.com or call 1-844-LA-AHEAD for more information and to apply. Follow Well-Ahead on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/WellAheadLA and Twitter @WellAheadLA.

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