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When the Simplest Solution Provides Wellness Success!

A popular advertising campaign several years ago coined the phrase, “hit the ‘easy’ button.” As employers look to add more complicated wellness programs for employees, the San Joaquin Valley Insurance Authority (SJVIA) has found success with programs that are simple and ‘easy’. Once each year, Public Sector Employers, as members of the SJVIA, compete in one of the simplest activities – walking! Walking is a form of exercise accessible to just about everybody, is low-impact, and can ease you into a higher level of fitness and health. It's safe, simple and doesn't require practice. The “Walking Works Challenge” encourages members to improve their physical fitness and provide friendly competition between participants. The SJVIA is distributing 7,500 pedometers donated by Anthem Blue Cross to employees who participate and record their steps daily from **May 11th – May 15th**!

County of Fresno Board of Supervisors Chairman Debbie Poochigian commented, “*The friendly competition between Fresno and Tulare County and within departments has made this Walking Works Challenge one of our most successful efforts in getting employees to participate and make meaningful changes in their daily routine. Go Fresno County!*” Last year thousands of employees participated and the competition encouraged teams to walk together and record their results. Participants reported improved fitness awareness that will translate to changing everyday behaviors. “*In the end, this effort is about encouraging employees to be proactive with their health on a daily basis.*” said SJVIA Board of Directors Vice Chairman and County of Tulare Supervisor, Pete Vander Poel.

The SJVIA Board of Directors approved the Walking Works Challenge as a way to promote wellness for its members, and do its part to keep overall medical costs down for each member entity. Members also participate in a “Step Ahead” walking challenge that allows employees to earn points towards incentives. Participating Entities include the County of Fresno, County of Tulare, City of Ceres, City of Clovis, City of Farmersville, City of Gustine, City of Hanford, City of Hughson, City of Modesto, City of Oakdale, City of Reedley, City of Riverbank, City of San Joaquin, City of Sanger, City of Tulare, City of Wasco, Kings Superior Court, and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The SJVIA was formed for the purpose of achieving greater critical mass for health insurance volume purchasing by public entities and reducing administrative costs. Collaboration in purchasing health insurance and wellness efforts has proven to be a successful model for participating Counties and Cities. The SJVIA has averaged single digit increases in annual benefit costs since 2009, which is well below the national average and credits wellness initiatives as a vital component.

For more information, please contact Rhonda Sjostrom, SJVIA Manager (rsjostro@co.tulare.ca.us) or Paul Nerland, SJVIA Assistant Manager (pnerland@co.fresno.ca.us).