State governments provide health insurance to a higher proportion of older workers than many private sector employers. These workers tend to have a higher incidence of chronic diseases, like diabetes, which contribute to higher healthcare costs.

Diabetes self-management education (DSME) can improve blood sugar control in people with diabetes by promoting healthy lifestyle changes. Better control of blood sugar helps reduce costly diabetes complications such as heart attack and kidney disease.

Offering state employees health benefit coverage for lifestyle change programs not only helps them improve quality of life, it provides a potential fiscal benefit to the state through employee retention and recruitment, and reduced insurance-related costs.

To meet the high need for DSME represented by Mississippi’s high prevalence of diabetes (14.7 percent of adults), the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) provides American Diabetes Association-recognized [py1] DSME programs. This recognition means the program provides quality education based on national standards for diabetes education.

The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) helped the state plan and host a state engagement meeting on diabetes prevention. NACDD, along with Leavitt Partners, gathered information from MSDH and Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration staff on diabetes efforts in the state.

As a result, the staff from the two state agencies came together to collaborate on a plan to offer diabetes testing and evidence-based management programs for state employees.

The MSDH testing team works with Worksite Wellness Champions and others at state agencies to facilitate onsite A1C testing during events for employees. A1C is a measure of average blood sugar levels during the past two to three months, and is an indicator for diabetes or prediabetes.

The Department of Finance and Administration now covers the cost of A1C testing for eligible state employees who participate in a MSDH A1C testing event.

MSDH provides the DSME program to any state employee who qualifies based on their A1C results, and receives payment for the services under the wellness benefit for participants who are enrolled in the Mississippi State and School Employees’ Health Insurance Plan. (This benefit also is available for any employee whose test results indicate prediabetes.)

MSDH is developing capacity to provide DSME in all three public health regions of the state. Senate Bill 2646, which created the State Employee Wellness Plan, grants state employees two to three hours of administrative leave per month for health education activities like DSME.

Screening test results from 14 events with 351 people indicated that 45 percent of employees tested had diabetes or prediabetes.

As they learn about the free testing, more state agencies contact MSDH to schedule events.