

# COUNTY OF VENTURA WELLNESS PROGRAM

(VC-WELL: Ventura County – Working Energetically Loving Life)

## Annual Report 2021



**COUNTY** *of* **VENTURA**

County Executive Office  
Human Resources/Benefits

**Promoting Good Health and Helping Manage Health Care Costs**

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**County Executive Office • Human Resources Division**

## **I. Program Background**

In 1983, the County of Ventura experienced a 71% increase in medical claims. In response, the Board of Supervisors approved a Labor Management Committee recommendation to establish the County's Wellness Program as part of the solution to help contain escalating health care costs. Since initiated in 1985, the Wellness Program has won numerous awards and has continued to develop and offer programs to help employees improve their health.

## **II. Program Design/Health Management Strategies**

The goals of the County's Wellness Program (VC-WELL) are to promote health and well-being of County employees and help mitigate increases in health care costs. The primary objectives are to:

1. Provide education and resources to help employees identify and reduce health risks before serious health problems occur.
2. Provide a culture and environment supportive of healthy behaviors, and one that makes healthy choices the easiest choice at the workplace.
3. Increase participation and engagement in VC-WELL programs.
4. Improve accessibility to VC-WELL programs and resources.
5. Provide follow-up to employees identified with health risks linked to preventable illnesses and excessive medical costs, and when health conditions do exist, refer employees to programs & resources to manage their condition/s.

### **Health Risk Assessment/Biometric Screening**

VC-WELL's Personal Wellness Profile (PWP) provides participants with access to a comprehensive Health Risk Assessment (HRA) & biometric screening. To make the HRA more meaningful, participants can include their biometric results from their physician, or a County sponsored onsite biometric screening that measures blood pressure, BMI, waist, total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, triglycerides, and glucose. Immediately following an onsite screening, participants can meet with a health educator to review their results and ask questions. Participants with health risks receive follow-up and referrals as appropriate and are invited to meet with the County's health coach to address their health issues. All personal information remains completely confidential and is protected in compliance with HIPAA. *Exhibit A shows screening participation between 2016-2021 and indicates a significant increase in screening participation after enhancements to the program were made in 2018. Screenings were canceled in 2021 due to COVID-19.*

### **Health Coaching**

Best-practice research also demonstrates the value of health coaching for employees with health risks to reduce and improve their risks. VC-WELL offers health coaching to employees with health risks known as Health Track. PWP participants identified with risk factors such as high blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol are invited to join Health Track. Participants work with a health coach to teach, inspire, and support them with lifestyle changes. Our health coaches are health professionals such as Registered Dietitians and Certified Diabetes Educators. *Exhibit B shows coaching participation since 2018. Participation had been increasing until the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in 2020.*

### **Health Education (HE) & Physical Activity (PA) Classes**

VC-WELL provides HE and PA classes to help employees make lifestyle changes to reduce their health risks and improve their quality of life. Topics focus on areas of nutrition, fitness, stress management, and healthy living. *Historically, in-person HE class participation has been low. After implementing virtual classes in 2019, VC-WELL offered them exclusively in 2020. Going virtual significantly increased participation for all classes offered. Because of the pandemic, PA classes were canceled in 2020 and replaced with virtual on-demand classes. In 2021, Wellbeats was offered to provide all employees with free access to virtual PA and HE class programming. Exhibits C and D show the significantly positive impact going virtual had on HE and PA class participation.*

### **Physical Activity Challenges**

VC-WELL continues to leverage WELLtrek, a web-based & mobile physical activity tracking platform, to increase the physical activity level of our employees. *Throughout 2021, VC-WELL offered a full assortment of challenges to engage our employees to be more active during the pandemic. Exhibit E displays unique users each year and shows a significant 182% increase since 2017. The exhibit also displays average annual steps/user.*

### **Healthy Work Environment, Tools, and Campaigns**

VC-WELL also promotes an environment supportive of healthy lifestyles with various events & campaigns. However, with many employees teleworking during the pandemic, we've adjusted by offering more virtual programs. *New for 2021, VC-WELL offered employees free premium access to Headspace, an industry best stress management & sleep app to support mental health & well-being. We continue to offer a Weight Watchers (WW) reimbursement and processed 18 claims in 2021 for \$500. We also updated our website with additional content to ensure our workforce has access to cutting edge resources.*

### **Recreation and Leisure Events**

VC-WELL offers a variety of recreational activities, including weekend hikes, and two recreational tournaments a year: softball and bowling. For individuals who are not health conscious but enjoy sports/recreation/leisure activities, these activities can act as a "gateway" into more traditional health improvement activities. *Although some events were canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic, we were able to bring back the softball tournament in 2021 and had 3 new agencies participate in the event.*

### **Incentive Program**

Incentives are increasingly being utilized by employers to encourage greater participation in workplace wellness programs. The County's 2011-2016 Strategic Plan included an objective to develop a wellness incentive program. Incentive research showed cash & premium discounts were the most used, so this led to the creation of our flagship cash award program in 2018 – "**WELLthy Reward\$.**" The premise is simple...the more VC-WELL programs employees complete, the higher the cash award they can earn based on meeting three different points thresholds, each linked to a specific cash amount. Cash awards are taxable and paid via payroll. *As shown in Exhibit F, since starting cash awards in 2018, the number of awards earned have steadily increased. However, the pandemic did have a negative impact in 2021, likely due to biometric screenings being canceled.*

### III. Program Participation

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had an adverse impact on participation for some of our programs. Because biometric screenings were canceled due to COVID, participation in screenings (0) and HRAs (211) were significantly lower than 2020. Coaching sessions were also lower (215) compared to 2020. This is not surprising as coaching sessions mirror screening participation since screenings identify employees who are referred to coaching.

One of VC-WELL's programs that fared well in 2021 during the pandemic was our new virtual on-demand fitness & health class app – **Wellbeats**. Since implementing virtual programs, participation in them have significantly increased, with physical activity participation **increasing 370%** from the prior year in-person classes were offered in 2019.

Changing to a virtual format in 2019 for health education classes continues to be a huge success as average class participation jumped to 89.9 participants in 2021, a **789% increase** since 2016. WELLtrek usage continued to improve, culminating in the Million Steps Challenge having the highest number of employees ever to complete it – **669**, a **6% increase** compared to 631 in 2020. Transitioning to virtual programming has proven to be an effective strategy maximizing employee engagement while reducing program costs.

VC-WELL continues to tweak programs and activities to leverage WELLthy Reward\$ to improve overall engagement in the program. Unfortunately, cancellation of screenings, a popular and high points activity, reduced the amount of cash awards earned in 2021. We hope to resume the biometric screening program in 2022 to have our full menu of points-based activities. Please see Exhibits A – G to see participation trends for various programs.

### IV. Risks Identified

VC-WELL has been successful in identifying risk factors associated with the leading causes of death and disease. Table 1 summarizes the risks identified among those who completed a PWP in 2021. Some of those identified with health risks were previously unaware of their condition.

Table 1

Initial Status of Wellness Profile Participants 2021	
Percentage	Factors
46% (97)	Got less than recommended physical activity
3% (6)	Had elevated cholesterol
1% (2)	Smoked
67% (142)	Were overweight or obese
12% (26)	Had elevated blood pressure
19% (39)	Had diabetes/prediabetes
47% (99)	Had at least one high stress indicator present
59% (125)	Had a low fruit/vegetable intake

**Table 2**

<b>Wellness Profile Participant CY 2021 Initial Risk Factor Combinations</b>	
<b>Number of Risk Factors</b>	<b>Percent of People</b>
0 Risk Factors	<b>27.5% (58)</b>
1 Risk Factor	<b>30.3% (64)</b>
2 to 3 Risk Factors	<b>27.5% (58)</b>
4 to 5 Risk Factors	11.8% (25)
6 or more Risk Factors	<b>2.8% (6)</b>

## **V. Participant Satisfaction**

VC-WELL participants complete evaluations of various programs. Participants consistently give high ratings for our programs. Based on feedback, employees have been very satisfied with program enhancements and new programs offerings.

- *“I just wanted to say that the wellness program is doing such a great job!”*
- *“I just went to your website for the first time in a while and it looks great! Your team is really doing a great job communicating with the County family and making it easy to learn how to take care of our health. Thank you for all of your hard work!”*

### **2021 Survey highlights:**

- 95% of softball participants rated their overall experience as excellent or good

## **VI. Conclusion**

The County invests heavily in its most important asset – its employees. VC-WELL is an important tool in helping the County meet its strategic plan with respect to meeting objectives linked to workforce health, and the ability to serve the community through Strategic Goal 4 of Focus Area #2: *to champion and invest in workplace policies, programs and practices that promote the overall health and well-being of all County employees.*

Continuing to invest in workforce health is wise and prudent, so it is crucial that VC-WELL continues to receive the support and resources necessary to fulfill its mission. It is recommended that industry best practices, programs and policies are considered and implemented when available and appropriate. Some of these practices include:

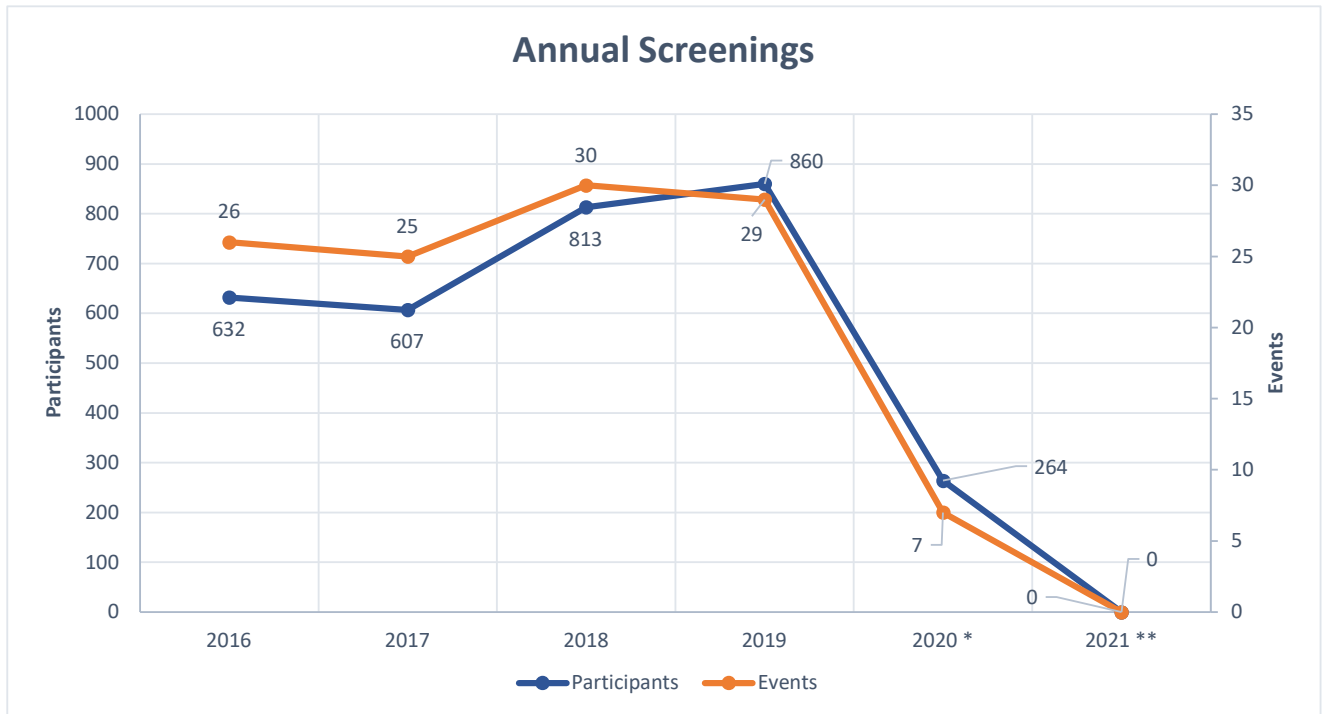
- Greater intra-departmental promotion of the program
- Opportunity to participate in programs and classes (release time)
- Wellness Leadership training and recognition (management support)
- Greater engagement by leadership in the program
- Continue transforming our environment & culture to one that permeates well-being
- Expand use of incentives to increase participation

## Exhibit A: Biometric Screening Participation 2016-2021

Screening						
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 *	2021 **
# Participants	632	607	813	860	264	0
# Events	26	25	30	29	7	0
Participants/Event	<b>24.31</b>	<b>24.28</b>	<b>27.10</b>	<b>29.66</b>	<b>37.71</b>	<b>N/A</b>
% Change from previous year		-0.11%	11.61%	9.43%	27.18%	N/A
% Change from 2016		-0.11%	11.49%	22.00%	55.15%	N/A

\* COVID-19 Pandemic (Canceled March - June)

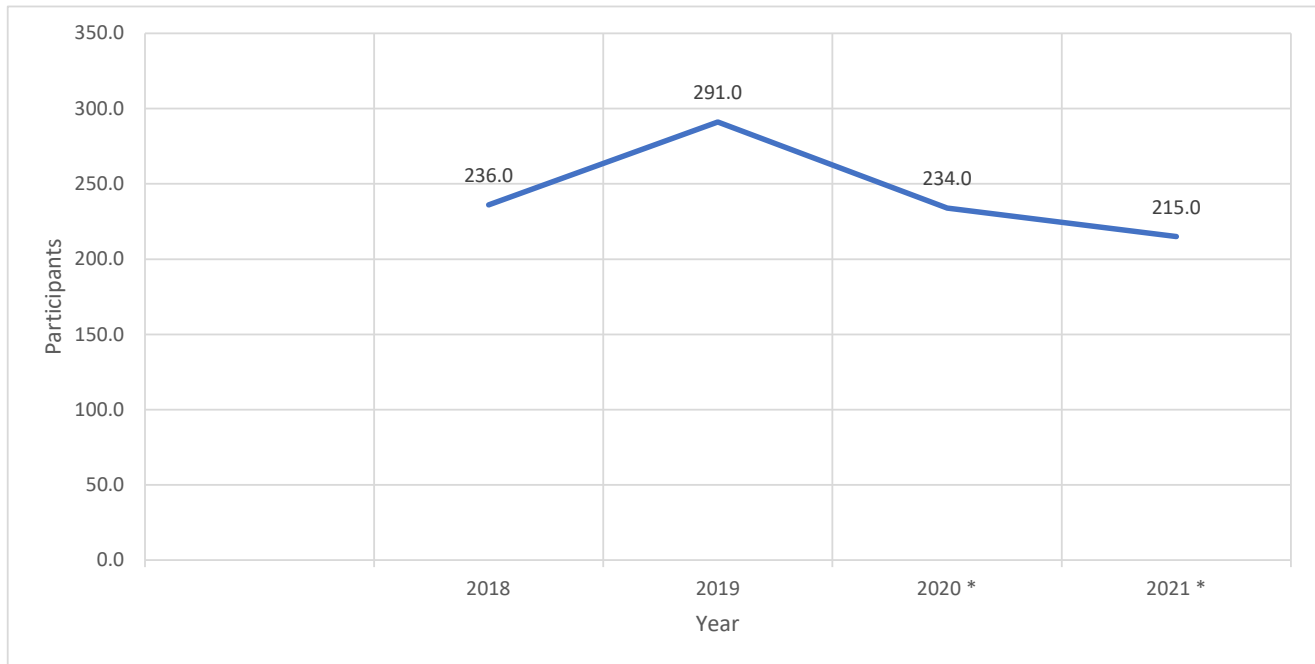
\*\* COVID-19 Pandemic (Canceled entire year)



## Exhibit B: One-on-One Health Coaching Participation 2018-2021

Health Coaching Sessions					
		2018	2019	2020 *	2021 *
<b># Sessions</b>		236.0	291.0	234.0	215.0
<b>% Change from prior year</b>			23.3%	-19.6%	-8.1%
<b>% Change from 2018</b>				-0.8%	-8.9%
<b>Session Type</b>		<i>In-Person</i>	<i>In-Person</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Virtual</i>

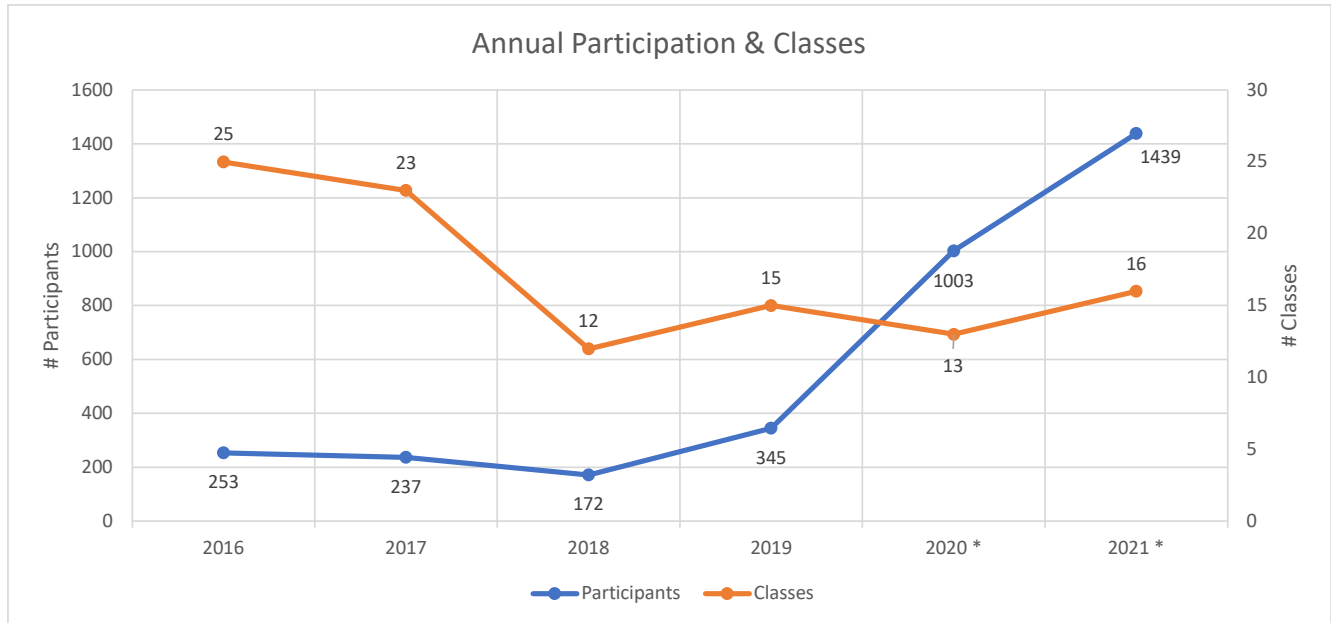
\* COVID-19 Pandemic



### Exhibit C: In-Person to Virtual Class Participation 2016-2021

Health Education Classes						
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 *	2021 *
# Participants	253	237	172	345	1003	1439
# Classes	25	23	12	15	13	16
Participants/Class (Avg.)	10.1	10.3	14.3	23.0	77.2	89.9
% Change from prior year		1.8%	39.1%	60.5%	235.5%	16.6%
% Change from 2016			41.6%	127.3%	662.4%	788.7%
Class Type	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	IP & Virtual	Virtual	Virtual

\* COVID-19 Pandemic



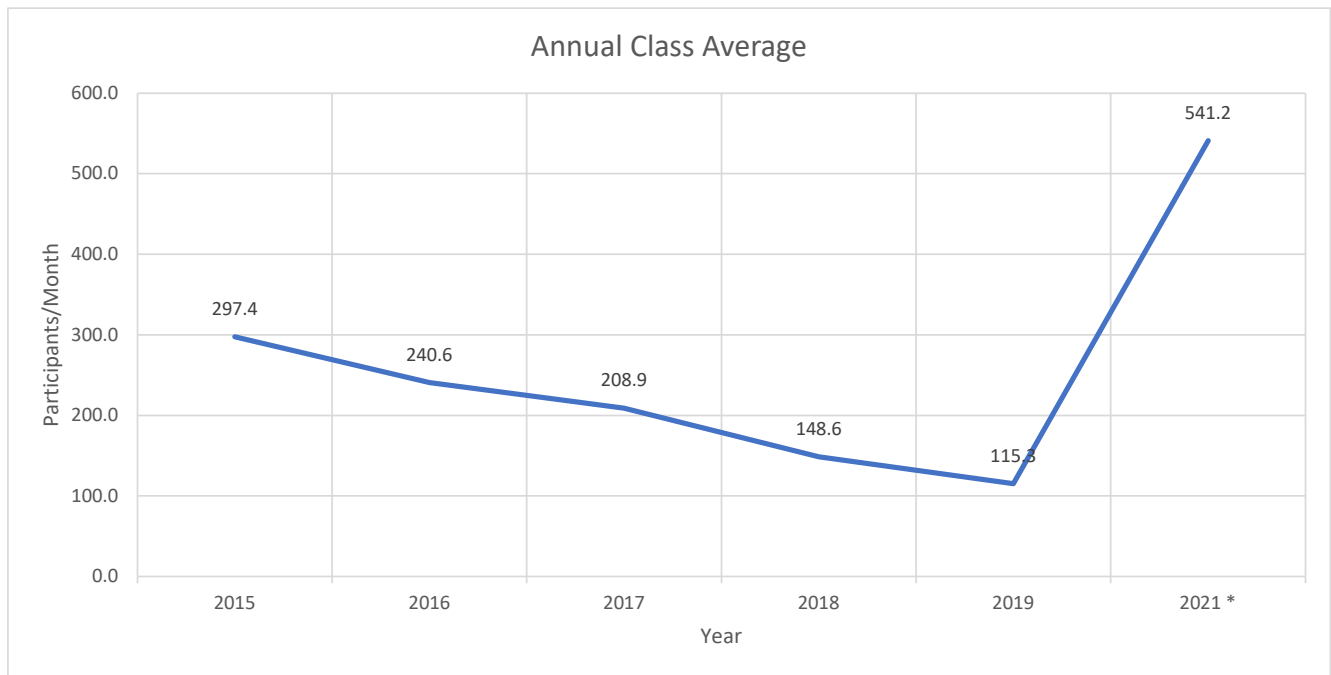


### Exhibit D: In-Person to Virtual Class Participation 2015-2021

Activity Classes						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021 *
# Participants	3569	2887	2507	1783	1383	5953
# Months	12	12	12	12	12	11
Participants/Month (Avg.)	297.4	240.6	208.9	148.6	115.3	541.2
% Change from prior year		-19.1%	-13.2%	-28.9%	-22.4%	369.6%
% Change from 2015			-29.8%	-50.0%	-61.2%	82.0%
Class Type	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	Virtual

\* 2021 Wellbeats class usage

2020 classes canceled due to COVID-19



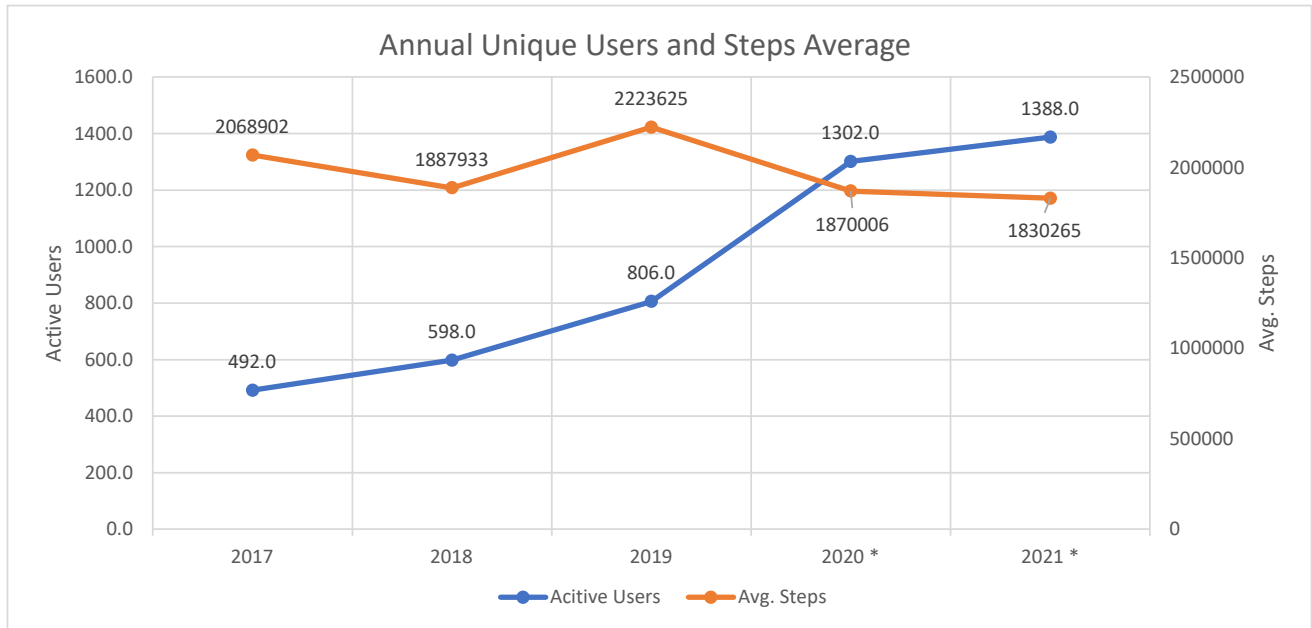
### Exhibit E: Annual Unique Active WELLtrek Users 2017-2021

Unique Active Users					
	2017	2018	2019	2020 *	2021 *
# Unique Users	492.0	598.0	806.0	1302.0	1388.0
% Change from prior year		21.5%	34.8%	61.5%	6.6%
% Change from 2017			63.8%	164.6%	182.1%

Average Annual Steps per User					
	2017	2018	2019	2020 *	2021 *
Average Steps/User	2068902	1887933	2223625	1870006	1830265
% Change from prior year		-8.7%	17.8%	-15.9%	-2.1%
% Change from 2017			7.5%	-9.6%	-11.5%

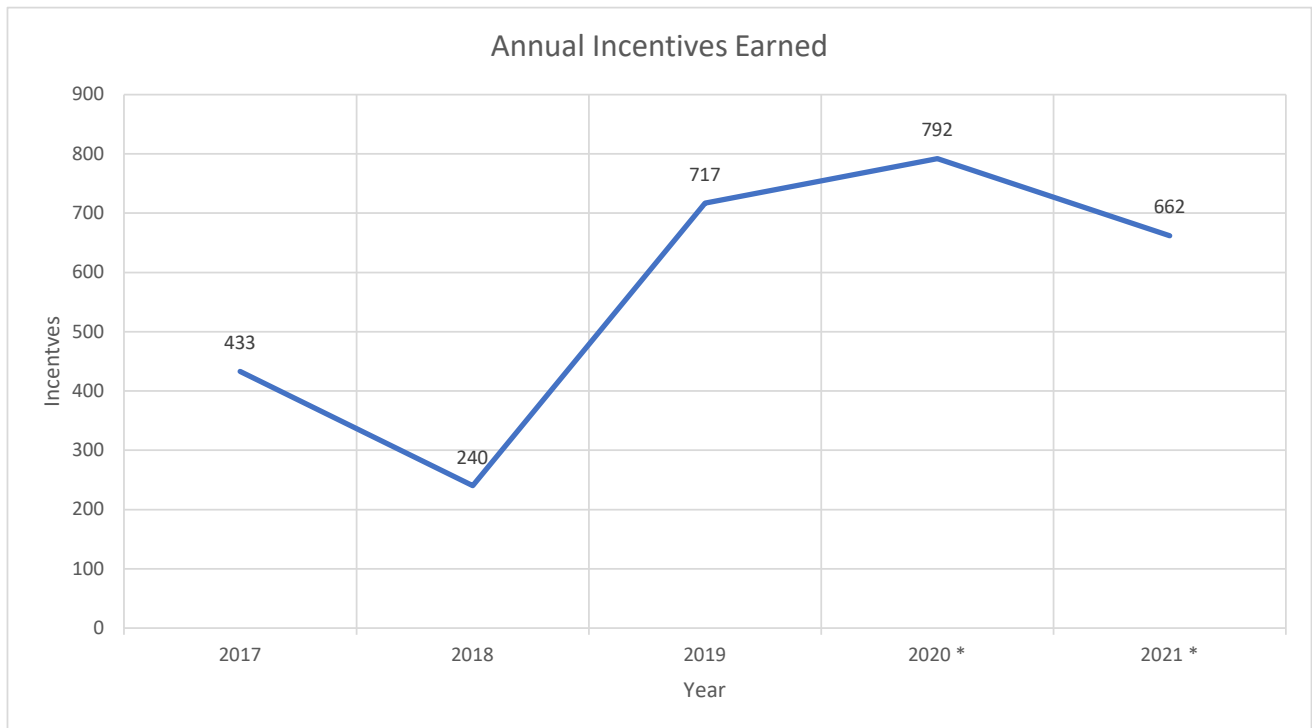
\*COVID-19 Pandemic



### Exhibit F: Incentives Earned 2017-2021

Incentives Earned					
	2017	2018	2019	2020 *	2021 *
Annual incentives	433	240	717	792	662
% Change from prior year		-44.6%	198.8%	10.5%	-16.4%
% Change from 2017			65.6%	82.9%	52.9%

\* COVID-19 Pandemic Years: 2020 - 2021 (screenings canceled in 2021 and 4 mos of 2020)



**Exhibit G: 2016 - 2021 COV Wellness Program Dashboard**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020 *	2021 *	Reference #
<b>Incentive</b>							
Incentive amount value	\$120	\$120	\$500	\$100-\$1000	\$100-\$300	\$100-\$300	80% ERs > \$150
Incentive type	Fitbit	Fitbit	Cash	Cash	Cash	Cash	Cash/GCs/Premiums
<b>Participation</b>							
Benefits eligible employee headcount (as of 1/1)	8434	8702	8593	8579	8565	8621	Lg. ERs > 4999
Biometric wellness screenings (onsite & Dr. physical)	981	885	829	888	560 *	0 *	63% ERs offer
<b>Percent workforce participation</b>	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>6.5% *</b>	<b>0% *</b>	<b>43.0%</b>
Health Risk Assessments (HRA)	1342	1199	750	874	565	211	78% ERs offer
<b>Percent workforce participation</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>45.0%</b>
WELLtrek (unique engaged EE#)	214	492	598	806	1302	1388	
<b>Percent workforce participation</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	
Incentives earned	759	433	240 **	717	792	662	59% ERs offer
<b>Percent workforce participation</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>9.2%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	
<b>Health Outcomes (biometrics &amp; HRA)</b>							
Average risk factors per employee per year	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>	
Risk stratification: Percent of participants who are low risk	<b>72.9%</b>	<b>73.1%</b>	<b>72.4%</b>	<b>74.1%</b>	<b>72.6%</b>	<b>74.9%</b>	
Percent workforce having good or excellent Wellness Score	<b>86.9%</b>	<b>87.9%</b>	<b>89.3%</b>	<b>89.5%</b>	<b>89.2%</b>	<b>84.9%</b>	
Average Wellness Score (0 - 100; higher the better)***	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	

\*\*\* Wellness Score Categories:  
 Excellent = 80 - 100  
 Doing Well = 60 - 79  
 Needs Improving = 20 - 59  
 High Risk = 0 - 19

\* COVID-19 Pandemic Years: 2020 - 2021 (screenings canceled in 2021 and 4 mos of 2020)

\*\* Eligible for random drawing of eighty (80) \$500 cash awards

# 2020 Kaiser/HRET Employer Benefits Survey