Mission of AOM: The America On the Move Foundation is a national non-profit organization. Our mission is to improve health and quality of life by promoting small changes in healthful eating and active living among individuals, families, communities and society. America On the Move has been a leader in promoting the “small changes” approach to changing behavior and the environment in order to prevent weight gain in the population. AOM has helped change the direction of the obesity field toward 1) prevention of weight gain vs treatment of existing obesity; 2) small vs large behavior changes; 3) applying the small changes approach to changing the environment.

We accomplish our mission by:

- Bringing scientists and non-scientists together from multiple disciplines in order to synthesize and stimulate new knowledge.
- Translating cutting-edge science into accessible information for easy use by individuals, groups and communities that can positively affect health behavior.
- Empowering individuals to take control of their health by making and sustaining small measurable changes to their daily eating and activity routines
- Encouraging public and private partnerships at the national, state and local level to build programs that reach individuals and communities and support sustainable behavioral change.

History of AOM: AOM was founded in 2003 as a national initiative following success with its precursor – Colorado On the Move. The roots of the foundation began with a group of leaders interested in the issues surrounding the obesity epidemic in 1998 with the founding of the Partnership to Promote Healthy Eating and Active Living (renamed the America On the Move Foundation in 2003). The origins are based in science and the desire to synthesize and stimulate new knowledge among scientists and non-scientists from multiple
disciplines. A summit was convened in April 2000 on “Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living: Developing a Framework for Progress. As a result of this summit, the America On the Move co-founders, James O. Hill, Ph.D., and John C. Peters, Ph.D. published a paper in *Science* (Hill et al, 2003) that established the theoretical basis for approaching the epidemic of obesity through a small changes approach. Colorado On the Move and later America On the Move were initiatives created to pursue the small changes approach to addressing obesity.

**AOM Reach:** AOM provides free web-based programs, tools, and resources to individuals, families, groups and communities of all types and sizes. AOM helps participants set small change goals for modifying diet and physical activity, provides tools and tips for achieving these small change goals and provide tools for tracking progress in achieving behavior goals. Recent additions include tools and tips for using the small change approach in modifying the physical environment for food and physical activity and tools for creating social interactions among people pursuing lifestyle changes.

Since 2003 AOM has reached approximately 30 million people through the AOM website or through programs in schools, worksites or communities. AOM developed a school program, Balance First, in partnership with PepsiCo. This program consists of 6 lessons aimed at teaching first through fifth graders about energy balance based on positive nutrition and physical activity behaviors. The Coordinator’s Kit has been utilized by over 14,000 groups to start programs in worksites, faith-based organizations, service organizations, and civic groups. Communities across the country have adopted AOM to bring together the various entities within a community and create something positive based on health. Over 160,000 healthcare professionals have been reached with the Healthcare Providers Toolkit.

AOM has developed a Family Program based on our successful research studies showing the AOM small changes approach can help families prevent excessive weight gain. This helps adults avoid weight gain and helps children, particularly overweight children, to reduce their rate of weight gain and to grow into a healthier BMI. The AOM family program helps families set diet and physical activity goals, provides tips for achieving goals and tools for tracking outcomes.
Communities participating with AOM have been able to spread the program virally throughout and have seen the benefits of working toward a common goal. Individual groups within a community benefit individuals by increasing physical activity and eating more healthfully. Qualitative data reveal that participants feel better, sleep better, enjoy the increased social interaction, and like to contribute to a common cause. Worksites report increased morale and productivity.

**Small Changes Research:** While a small changes approach to addressing behavior change is intuitive, AOM has conducted several research studies to show the effectiveness of this approach in increasing physical activity, decreasing energy intake, and preventing excessive weight gain. AOM has conducted research in three areas: 1) epidemiological research to show the relationship between walking and obesity rates; 2) intervention studies to evaluate the impact of the small changes approach on prevention of weight gain; 3) research with AOM participants through the AOM website. All AOM publications are references at the end of this testimony.

AOM has promoted the use of pedometers as tools for increasing physical activity and has published survey research showing that there is a strong inverse correlation between steps/day (as measured with pedometers) and body mass index (BMI). AOM has provided the first nationally representative data (publication in preparation) showing walking behavior in Americans.

AOM has conducted research demonstrating that a small changes approach can be effective in 1) decreasing energy intake; 2) increasing physical activity in worksites and churches; 3) decreasing excessive weight gain in families with overweight children.

In addition to the measures of success listed above, AOM conducts focus groups with participants, non-participants, and group organizers as well as distributes surveys to online users. Each participant is asked to register with AOM via the website and complete a multi-question survey initially and at the end of a six week challenge for comparison. Data collection via the AOM website ([www.americaonthemove.org](http://www.americaonthemove.org)) indicates that participants increase steps by just under 2000 over baseline, and move from being active zero to three days to being active 4 or more days of the week.
**AOM Funding**: Funding for AOM has been obtained from a variety of sources including federal funding for research from NIH and CDC and private/corporate funding for the development and delivery of programs. The model used has been to obtain funding to develop programs for our various target audiences and offer the programs free of charge to the end users allowing us to offer programming to all segments of the population. We have received both NIH and USDA funding to study the small changes approach as a strategy to address obesity.

**Why is AOM Appealing?** AOM has appeal as a lifestyle modification program because:

1. **It is simple.** Small changes in diet and physical activity are clearly specified and achievable by just about everyone.

2. **Easy to implement.** Making simple dietary changes or walking an additional 2000 steps/day is easy for everyone to accomplish, even within their busy lives.

3. **Can be done by anyone, anywhere.** AOM does not require special equipment, special food or special places to go. The small changes can be achieved by anyone, no matter what their current lifestyle and just about anywhere.

4. **Inexpensive.** Participating in AOM is easy and inexpensive. We recommend a pedometer but no other special equipment. All programs and tips are available for free on the AOM website or via AOM mobile?.

5. **Changes that can be implemented and sustained within busy lifestyles.** AOM asks people to make lifestyle changes that are feasible to be achieved and maintained.

6. **Small change approach works for all ages and all cultural groups.** The simple nature of the program and the many ways to achieve small changes make the program appealing to all ages and to different cultural groups.

**AOM in the Workplace:** AOM is currently being used by approximately 14,000 groups, most of which are worksites. Other groups include church groups, neighborhood groups, etc. AOM appears to be most attractive
to small to mid size worksites, although we are working with some very large employers such as Pfizer, British Petroleum, PepsiCo Bottling Group, University of Colorado Hospital and the University of Texas system.

The AOM worksite program is well suited for small to mid size employers because it is free and does not require dedicated staff to implement at the worksite. A complete kit with tips and tools is downloadable from the AOM website. The nature of taking small incremental steps to change behavior makes the AOM program inclusive of a wide range of individuals. Individuals start where they are and challenge themselves rather than each other, making it possible for those who are very inactive to participate along with those individuals who are extremely active. Each person sets his/her own goals and works toward achieving them. The website redesign will also allow worksites to communicate with each other and share ideas, tips and challenges.

The Coordinator Toolkit is downloadable from the AOM website was created for any groups wanting a simple worksite wellness program in which all employees can participate at a low cost. The Kit contains all the information needed to get started: Understanding the AOM Small Change Message, Making the case for a worksite wellness program, a check sheet, holding a kickoff event, incentives, using the AOM website, promotional tools, handouts, and suggestions for evaluating the program. Wellness coordinators can set up a group on the AOM website allowing them the means to track progress of that group. Each group member can register with AOM, track steps during a 6 week challenge and receive motivational messages each day for 42 days. Individual progress is tracked along a self-selected trail that provides interest and motivation to the participant. At the end of the challenge the coordinator/group administrator can run reports for the group showing group outcomes for steps.

The spread of AOM has been viral – worksites find the worksite program via word of mouth, via our sponsors, from individuals whose family members or friends have participated in an AOM program and recommended it to others, as well as other worksites. It is picked up by wellness coordinators or committees looking for a program that can be quickly and inexpensively implemented. It is used to get a worksite started on a path to wellness and is often combined with other programs; e.g., University Physicians, Inc. incorporated AOM with a weight loss program so that all employees could be engaged in worksite wellness. Worksites
generally attract a large number of employees to participate since all employees start where they are and set individual goals rather than compete against one another. The wellness committee or other worksite wellness champion can get things started by following the steps outlined in the Coordinators Kit. Many groups form teams to assist with motivation and create challenges such as greatest percentage participation from a department or greatest percentage increase in physical activity and some groups challenge each other for greatest number of steps.

We have learned that for a successful program, buy-in from upper management is essential and they need to participate along with the rest of the workforce. Incentives are nice but are not what keeps employees motivated and sustained. When employees are recognized for their participation and given time to participate, they remain engaged and continue with the healthy behaviors. A word of caution about challenges for greatest number of steps is that the person who starts with the highest baseline average will generally win the challenge and that person was already active to start with. We have found it to be helpful to reward those who have low baselines and increase steps by a high percentage relative to that baseline. Other findings: greater than 50% of the worksites have 100 or more employees, 62% provide step counters to the employees, 56% of participants completed tracking for the duration of the 6 week challenge, 60% of employers reported and increase in employee morale and social support, 66% of the employers reported making changes to include healthy food at the workplace, encourage walking breaks, and experienced an increase in management promoting healthy behaviors, and just under 50% reported that employees continued to engage in the healthy behaviors three to six months after the challenge.

AOM programs are very flexible and can be adapted to any worksite, group, or community situation. The AOM message is to take small steps to change physical activity and eating behaviors as well as environmental change. This can be accomplished in any number of ways. AOM provides tools to get started, but leaves options open for adaptation. Most worksites personalize the program to fit the needs of the group and are very creative in the approach taken. A worksite with employees who are very fit might want to engage in more rigorous challenges as opposed to a worksite with very sedentary employees who just need to get
started. Most worksites, however, are a mix of these individuals and create programs that measure percentage change in physical activity or percentage participation within a department. Each worksite or group also decides how to incentivize participants and whether to provide pedometers or other tools for their program.

We are in the process of analyzing data from several communities and groups within those communities who have collected a variety of data. This is a combination of process and outcome data that will show efficacy and effectiveness of the AOM program. Focus groups and other forms of qualitative data have been collected from groups representing worksites, community groups, monolingual Spanish speaking groups, healthcare professionals, patients, and faith based groups. Focus groups have been conducted in both rural and urban settings. In addition, key informant interviews have been conducted with group administrators. The qualitative data indicate that in worksites employees experience an increase in morale and productivity, increased social support, decreased absenteeism, and positive changes to the worksite environment. Data is currently being collected from employers as to the return on investment and cost savings benefits.

The AOM Worksite Experience

A typical AOM worksite program starts with a wellness committee or upper management wanting to create a program for their employees. Most likely employees have sedentary jobs and have put on some extra weight in the last few years. A worksite will hold a series of meetings to introduce the employees to the AOM small changes concept and ask them to register either as a big group set up by a company administrator or in smaller work groups using a registration code generated by AOM. In the AOM Coordinators Toolkit are samples of signage that can be used to promote the program as well as posters/signage to encourage healthier physical activity and nutrition behaviors. At the introductory meeting employees receive all of the information needed to get started and participate in the AOM 6 week challenge. This may include a step counter for measuring physical activity as well as information on how to increase steps by increments of 2000 or how to decrease calories by 100 each day and an assessment of the food and physical activity environment at the workplace. It is important that employees know that upper management supports the program and gives employees time to attend the meeting as well as encourages active breaks during the day. Employees become
involved and help decide what they would like to do in terms of forming teams, creating competitions, and giving rewards for participation or meeting certain goals. Changes occurring around the worksite include: posters reminding people to be active and eat healthy, vending machines introducing healthy options as part of the selections, food served at meetings becoming healthier, walking groups forming, employees taking active breaks, annual company dinners offering healthy foods and some physical activity. AOM has an easy entry point and therefore most employees in a worksite register and are track steps online. Employees are instructed to not change activity during the first three days of the challenge so that they can calculate their baseline steps. Each employee is encouraged to increase steps by 2000 steps over baseline as a first goal and to find ways to decrease 100 calories from each day’s intake. Employees get behind the program and start initiating changes themselves. Candy dishes disappear from desks, social support and moral increases, and groups have fun walking together. The end result is a more productive workforce where managers are looking for other changes that can be made in the worksite as the feedback is generally very positive. Many worksites offer additional challenges and/or challenge other worksites e.g., a branch office or nearby business. Evaluation of the program is accomplished via downloadable reports from the AOM website and includes increase in physical activity, change in dietary behavior, and assessment of aggregate BMI.

AOM has noted several challenges over the years and makes periodic changes to keep the programs fresh and innovative. A current challenge is the need for a longer worksite program with more assessment. By next spring participants will be able to choose the length of a challenge and be able to take an online “Food and Physical Activity Scan” that will lead them to tailored goal setting and the ability to received tailored messages based on the goals selected. These messages will be motivational, educational, and connect an individual’s small changes to his/her carbon footprint. Group administrators have been challenged with retrieving group data from the AOM website. This, too, will be addressed in our website redesign with upgrades available next spring. It has been noted in a recent survey of our worksite groups that worksites are not conducting any analysis on return on investment or cost benefit. AOM will develop a tool to assist worksites in this analysis.
Who needs to be involved? To increase worksite participation more broadly human resource/benefit’s directors as well as insurance brokers need to be involved. Successful worksite programs must include the support of upper management and fit with the goals of the organization. The AOM worksite program is very adaptable to a wide variety of situations and can be used by individuals with different abilities and perspectives.

Success Story: University Physicians, Inc (UPI) is a worksite of approximately 325 employees many of whom were overweight. The jobs at UPI are very sedentary in nature and the food environment at this worksite was not healthy. High fat, high sugar foods and beverages were purchased for meetings and worksite events. Initially a weight management program was offered to employees desiring weight loss. Seventy out of a possible 325 employees signed up for the program and overall had a positive experience with good weight loss. Not all employees desired or needed weight loss but wanted to participate in a worksite wellness program. Management initiated and AOM program and had a 65% rate of participation. Employees took an AOM worksite food and physical activity environment assessment and determined that changes to support the small behavior changes would be needed. Vending machine foods were changed to include healthier options, food at meetings changed to healthier lower calorie options, and annual worksite celebrations included healthier foods as well as physical activity. The employees participated in two AOM 6 week challenges. Employees have continued to work on sustaining increased levels of physical activity and have healthy food options at the worksite.

Future Directions: AOM is in the midst of a complete website redesign that incorporates a social network for users to interact with others in similar circumstances, share stories and ideas for leading a healthier life, and provide encouragement. In addition, each registrant will be offered the ability to take a “Food and Physical Activity Scan” to assess individual nutrition and physical activity behaviors as well as environmental factors affecting these behaviors. The results of the assessment will lead the participant to choose from goals based on the scan. Participants will then receive tailored messages based on the goals during a challenge. These changes are designed to engage individuals and groups and sustain participation.
AOM Publications:


