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## **Center for Active Design Launches Fitwel<sup>SM</sup> certification to support healthier building environments and improve employee health and productivity**

The nonprofit Center for Active Design will launch Fitwel, a low-cost, high-impact building certification standard created with the vision for a healthier future where every building is enhanced to support occupant wellbeing.

(Washington, DC) – There is a growing body of evidence linking the design of our built environment to choices that impact health. The location, design, and management of buildings has a direct impact on occupant wellness. Healthier buildings benefit employee wellness, a top economic concern of Chief Financial Officers, and 90% of business leaders say that promoting wellness improves employee productivity. Looking to incentivize wellness supporting building amenities and polices the GSA (General Services Administration) and CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) led the development of Fitwel, a healthy building certification standard.

The Center for Active Design will be launching Fitwel to targeted private sector firms over the next year. Fitwel will be available for broader public use in 2017.

Fitwel is a unique, low-cost, high-impact certification standard enabling positive impacts on building occupant health and productivity through improvements to workplace design and policies. Fitwel enables buildings, often workplaces, to be assessed against a baseline of evidence-based criteria that define a health-promoting environment. In office environments, Fitwel's initial target market, the expected improvements in employee wellness may result in lower health care costs, lower rates of absenteeism, and increased revenue from enhanced employee performance. The Fitwel certification responds to the growing demand for recognition of healthier buildings and workplaces, serving as a market differentiator to retain and attract tenants and future employees.

### ***The Need for Healthier Buildings and Workplaces***

Employers are well aware of the impact health related costs have on their bottom line. For example, according to the Integrated Benefits Institute, productivity losses related to health, cost U.S. employers over \$225 billion annually. Research demonstrates benefits in employee health and productivity from health promotion through programs, policies, and environmental changes.

Fitwel provides a set of strategies that address the broad range of health risks within the building environment such as exposure to indoor pollutants and lack of access to healthy foods or places to get physical activity. Each criterion of the Fitwel scorecard is linked by scientific evidence to at least one of seven health impact categories (see attached image

a). According to Liz York, Chief Sustainability Office for CDC, “It is evident that our built environment has an effect on personal and public health. As building owners and managers begin to implement interventions based on the findings they receive from Fitwel, buildings across the nation and potentially the globe will support healthier occupant behaviors. Architects and designers can also design or redesign buildings to align with Fitwel concepts and improve the health benefits of the environments they are creating.”

### ***A Low Cost, High Impact Standard for All Buildings and Workplaces***

Fitwel guides and enables a healthier future where building design and policy supports occupant wellbeing and health. It is based on the premise that new and existing buildings—regardless of their size, age, budget, and location—can support healthy occupants through incremental changes.

GSA and CDC led the development of Fitwel basing it on the strongest available scientific evidence. Fitwel provides over 60 strategies applying evidence based strategies with the highest potential impact. The certification assesses workplace features including the design of stairwells and outdoor spaces, and policies such as indoor clean air standards and healthy food standards. The system is designed to encourage facility managers to work continually to increase building scores.

Fitwel will reach a broad, untapped market and will limit user expenses incurred from the certification process and implementation of strategies.

- Cost of the certification is low due to limited technical knowledge needed to apply for the certification.
- The self-assessment tool is web and mobile phone based with immediate calculation of rating.
- All strategies are voluntary, with no prerequisites or required strategies that may prove cost-inhibitive.

All certification system components, including a scorecard, scoring process, and a responsive web site, have been developed and pilot tested nationally in 89 public buildings, the majority of which are managed by the GSA.

Joanna Frank, Executive Director of the Center for Active Design, notes, “Given the body of available evidence, we are now at a pivotal moment where promoting employee health must be an imperative rather than a luxury. For this reason, we are committed to ensuring Fitwel is accessible to all businesses.”

American Institute of Architects EVP / CEO, Robert Ivy, FAIA said, “Architects are increasingly considering the health outcomes of their design strategies. Fitwel provides a tool to evaluate the design of their buildings through evidence-based criteria. This offering and the set of strategies that identifies the multitude of health risks within the built environment can be useful as the profession strives to design healthier spaces.”

*To learn more about the certification please visit: <https://fitwel.org/>. For information on joining the launch, please contact: [fitwel@centerforactivedesign.org](mailto:fitwel@centerforactivedesign.org).*

The Center for Active Design (CfAD) is the leading not-for-profit organization that uses design to foster healthy and engaged communities. CfAD takes a multi-disciplinary approach to translating research into practical design solutions that result in measurable outcomes. Based on emerging trends, community need, and supporting evidence, CfAD's areas of focus currently include housing, schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. For more information on the Center for Active Design, visit [www.centerforactivedesign.org](http://www.centerforactivedesign.org).

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