

## Case Study

# Taking Steps Toward Better Health: UC San Diego Stairwell Campaign



Healthy Campus  
Network



UC San Diego  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Center for  
Community Health

The University of California, San Diego Healthy Campus Network is an initiative of the University of California Global Food Initiative that works to make UC the healthiest place to work, learn, and live. The *Live Well @ Work* Initiative is a project of *Live Well San Diego: Healthy Works* and implemented by University of California, San Diego Center for Community Health. This work supports *Live Well San Diego*, the County vision of a region that is Building Better Health, Living Safely, and Thriving. Made possible with funding in part from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the University of California Office of the President.



# Executive Summary

## THE CHALLENGE

The University of California San Diego (UC San Diego) is one of the world's leading public research universities that consists of more than 36,000 students, 2,500 faculty, and 33,000 staff members. The campus community spends much of their time sedentary while studying, grading assignments, and completing administrative tasks. Nearly 50% of UC San Diego students report spending three or more hours a day seated performing non-academic activities.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in California 20.5% of adults do not meet the government's national physical activity recommendations for aerobic activity and muscle strengthening.<sup>2</sup> Lack of physical activity can have serious health consequences and has been shown to be a risk for cardiovascular disease along with other health conditions.

## THE SOLUTION

Healthy lifestyle habits, including regular exercise and good nutrition, are effective ways of reducing the risk for many health-related chronic diseases. In an effort to inspire the campus community to be more physically active as a part of their daily routine, UC San Diego Healthy Campus Network (HCN) collaborated with Live Well @ Work to develop and implement a stairwell campaign. For those that are able, choosing to take the stairs instead of the elevator is a simple way to integrate healthy movement into their day. Previous research indicates point of decision interventions are effective at increasing stairwell use at worksites and institutions.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

## THE RESULTS

UC San Diego HCN and Live Well @ Work collaborated with campus stakeholders to design and install point of decision signage to encourage stairwell usage in Urey Hall on campus. Using a digital people counter to track stairwell use throughout the project, initial data results indicate that stairwell use increased by 26% during the intervention and encouraged students, staff, and faculty to be more physically active.



## Why a Stairwell Campaign?

Developing a stairwell campaign is an easy way to increase activity at any organization. Stairwell interventions that use point of decision prompts to encourage stairwell use are effective in increasing behavior change at worksites and other institutions.<sup>3,4,5</sup> Research indicates that using the stairs for a few minutes a day can have significant health benefits, such as preventing yearly weight gain and reducing your risk of heart attack and stroke.

# Project Overview

## HEALTHY CAMPUS NETWORK

In 2017, UC President Napolitano, together with 10 chancellors, launched Healthy Campus Network (HCN) under the Global Food Initiative to work with each UC location to become a strong sustainable campus-coordinating structure to make UC a healthy place to work, learn, and live.

The UC San Diego HCN's goal is to develop a culture and infrastructure of health that is deeply integrated into the many aspects of university life. HCN is a multidisciplinary and cross-sector initiative comprised of over 100 members, facilitated by the UC San Diego Center for Community Health, and representing the diversity and richness of the campus community.

The vision of the HCN is for the health of the UC San Diego community to improve significantly over the next five years as evidence-based practices, activities, programs, and policies are implemented to support health and well-being for all individuals associated with the campus. The UC San Diego HCN promotes the integration of existing resources and new research-supported strategies to promote healthy lifestyles in every aspect of campus life. HCN is comprised of several working group modeled after the following dimensions of health: 1) Move Well, 2) Build Well, 3) Eat Well, 4) Mind Well, 5) Be Well, and 6) Care Well.

## LIVE WELL @ WORK

Live Well @ Work (LW@W) is a project of the County of San Diego Healthy Works program, implemented by UC San Diego Center for Community Health. This work supports the County's Live Well San Diego vision for a healthy, safe and thriving region. LW@W collaborates with the San Diego business community to create healthy food landscapes and opportunities for physical activity for low-resource employees who experience disproportionately higher rates of diet-related chronic diseases. By creating healthier environments at work, businesses may be able to reduce healthcare costs, increase employee productivity, and improve recruitment and retention of healthy employees.



## Collaboration from Campus Stakeholders

- Center for Community Health
- Environmental Health Services
- Human Resources
- Move Well, Be Well, and Build Well Working Groups
- Recreation
- Undergraduate Students
- Urey Hall
- Work/Life





## STAIRWELL CAMPAIGN PLANNING & DESIGN

The HCN's Move Well working group collaborated with Live Well @ Work to implement a "There's the Stairs!" stairwell campaign on campus as a part of a University of California-wide effort to promote health on campus through increased stairwell usage. The Move Well working group consisted of members from various units on UC San Diego's campus including the Center for Community Health, Recreation, Work/Life, Human Resources, as well as representation from several undergraduate students.

To identify and select a building on UC San Diego's geographically large campus to implement the campaign, the Move Well working group reached out to contacts from a directory of building managers through emails and phone calls. The group connected with Rick Thomas, a Facilities Director for several buildings on campus. As an individual who strives to be physically active and take the stairs daily, Thomas expressed a strong desire to participate in the stairwell campaign. He recommended Urey Hall as a best match for a site to implement the intervention. Urey Hall is a six-story building and one of the oldest buildings on campus that is frequented by many students, staff, and faculty within the campus community.

While the building was being identified, efforts to create original content and design for the stairwell posters was also underway. Focus group data, UC-wide campus feedback, and leaders from previous stairwell campaigns in the UC system recommended simple non-directive messaging focused on time and physical activity. These recommendations found messaging around time appeared to be the most effective motivator for stairwell use while physical activity messaging was also an effective motivator. Directive messaging such as, "Take the Stairs" appeared to be received less positively than non-directive messaging such as; "There's the Stairs."

The Move Well working group and Live Well @ Work partnered with the Associated Students' A.S. Graphics Studio on campus, as well as design company Deep Root Digital to develop a social marketing campaign that would resonate with students, staff, and faculty. Deep Root Digital guided the working group in developing prompts that focused on non-directive time and physical activity messages. They also produced eye-catching visuals to accompany the messages. A.S. Graphics Studio designed specific elements of the poster, including the UC San Diego Sun God using the stairs, to ensure the designs were customized to match UC San Diego branding and relevant to the campus community.

To arrive at the final design, the Center for Community Health distributed an electronic survey to all HCN members and encouraged them to vote for their favorites. After the results were tallied, the top two designs were then shared with the building manager for final review. Given that UC Policy allows each building on campus the autonomy to display interior signage of their choosing, Thomas and the building's Operations Director were integral in approving the design work. The building management team also played a key role in determining poster size and assessing poster placement within the building to ensure a successful intervention.



## THERE'S THE STAIRS!

The overall goal of the campaign was to demonstrate that 'point of decision' signs increase stairwell use, consequently increasing staff, faculty, and students' physical activity levels on campus. In an effort to measure the success of the intervention, the Move Well working group and Live Well @ Work installed an OmniCounter Pro, a digital people counter, to track number of people entering and exiting the in Urey Hall stairwell. The digital people counter was installed in March 2018 and tracked usage daily for three weeks to establish baseline stairwell usage. The stairwell data collection took place across all UC campuses and will contribute to the largest institutional-wide stairwell intervention study to date.

The primary stairwell intervention involved the installation of six 'point of decision' elevator signs. The focus of the design was to get the attention of individuals entering each floor's lobby or those waiting for the elevator in Urey Hall. The messages used for the UC San Diego There's the Stairs initiative included:

- 1) Late? Why Wait? There's the Stairs!
- 2) No Waiting There's the Stairs!
- 3) Every Step Counts There's the Stairs
- 4) Evade the Wait There's the Stairs
- 5) Free Workout There's the Stairs
- 6) Away with Delay There's the Stairs?

The posters also included an image of the UC San Diego Sun God using the stairs, which served as a logo for all of the stairwell campaign marketing and communication tools. The Move Well working group installed the posters on all six floors of the Urey Hall building near the elevator or in the lobby. After the stairwell posters were installed, stairwell usage was tracked from April through June 2018 over the duration of 10 weeks. Rotation of the posters occurred weekly in an effort to increase the chance of an individual noticing a different message or color.



## PROMOTION & ENGAGEMENT

HCN and the stairwell campaign's efforts were guided and informed by the belief in and commitment to inclusiveness, participation, accountability, and collaboration. To further promote the stairwell campaign, the Move Well working group worked with building operations to display the stairwell messages in English, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Spanish, the four most commonly spoken languages on UC San Diego campus, on multimedia screens located in the building lobby. These messages rotated on the television along with Urey Hall building announcements, and safety protocols. Additionally, at the start of the intervention a building-wide email was sent out to all faculty and staff encouraging them and their students to participate in the stairwell campaign.

Outreach promotion efforts included weekly tabling with giveaways promoting the stairwell campaign, handing out HCN There's the Stairs stickers, and speaking to students about HCN and the stairwell campaign. Each week tabling changed days and times in an effort to increase campaign exposure and reach.

The Urey Hall elevators also included healthy messaging around increasing relaxation and stress management. A poster was posted in each elevator prompting individuals to take 5 deep breathes to relax and increase their focus.



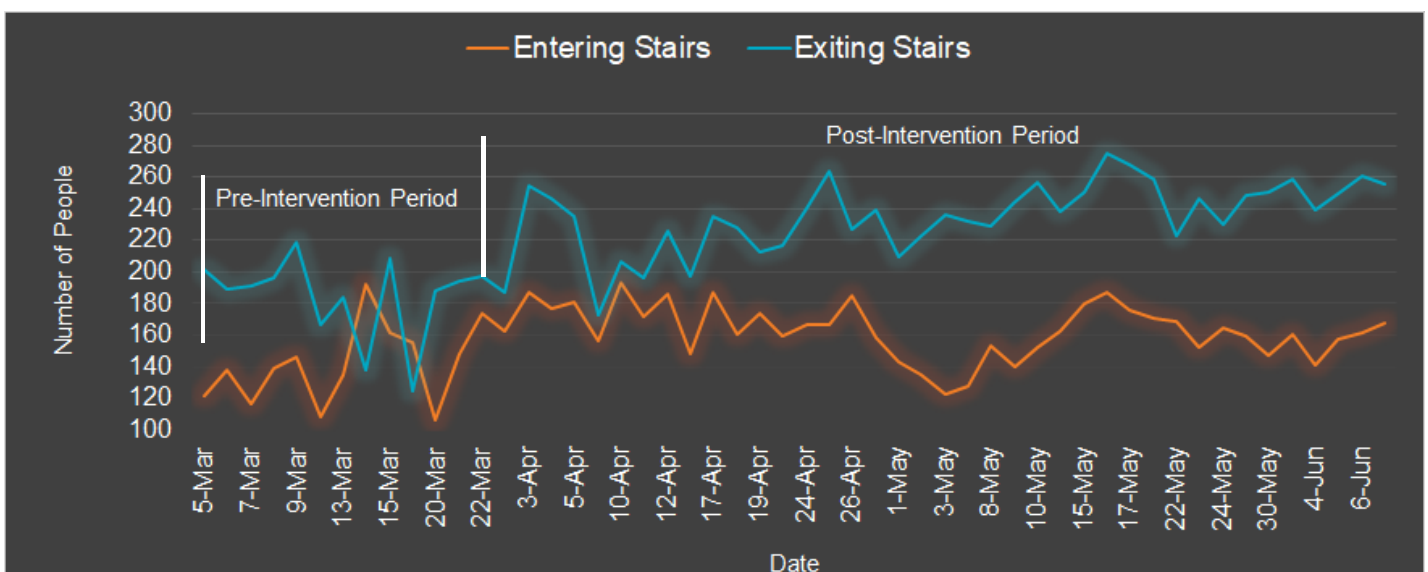
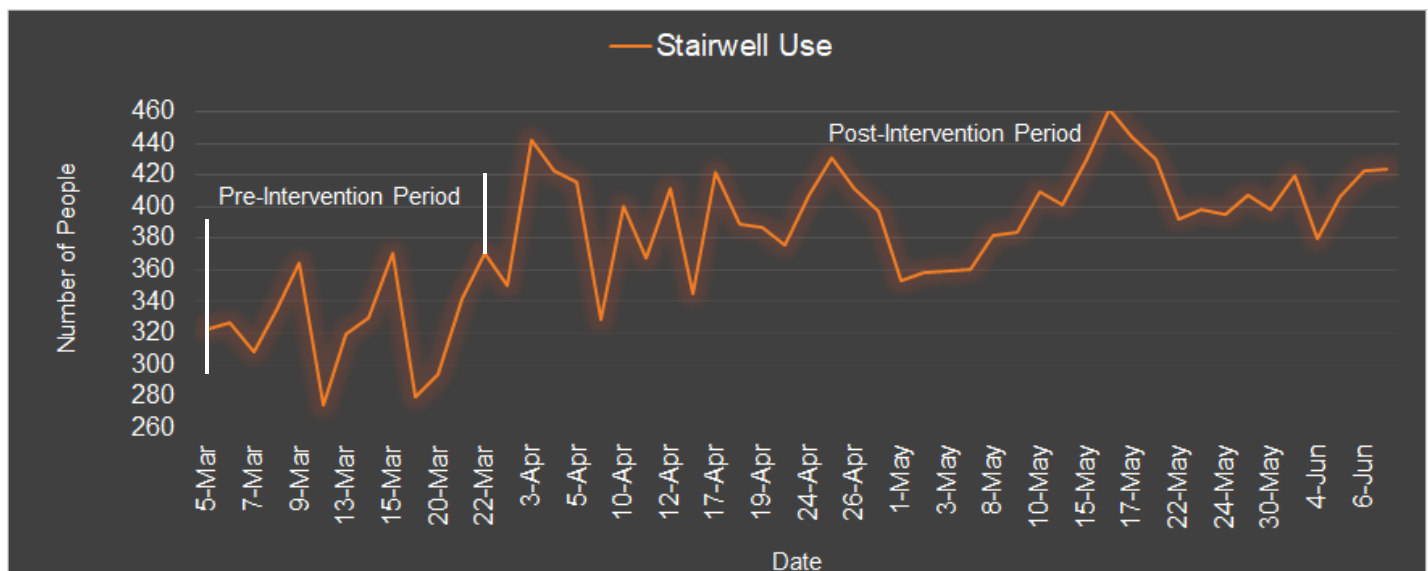


## RESULTS OF THE STAIRWELL CAMPAIGN

According to initial data results, there was a statistically significant difference between the numbers of people using the stairs from baseline to post-intervention. There was a significant increase in number of students, faculty, and staff entering and exiting the stairs:

- 17% increase in number of people entering the stairs
- 30% increase in number of people exiting the stairs
- 26% increase in overall stairwell usage

Additional analysis and feedback from the building manager and building occupants is underway to inform campus-wide adoption of stairwell practices.



## FUTURE DIRECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the project's success, there is interest from other buildings on the UC San Diego campus to implement a similar stairwell intervention. Eight buildings were identified as having a high stage of readiness to expand the intervention to including the Price Center, Applied Physics & Mathematics, as well as other buildings with heavy foot traffic. Due to the low cost and high reward potential, UC San Diego and other institutions should consider the implementation of an organization wide stairwell campaign as an environmental change to increase physical activity.

Given this project's limitations, Urey Hall's energy use was not collected at baseline or post-intervention. Future campaigns may consider quantifying potential energy, carbon emissions, and elevator maintenance cost savings from lowered elevator use.

HCN is founded on the investment in a host of small changes that culminate in a deep tectonic shift producing a lasting culture of health. The impetus for change comes from strategies that engage the campus community both from the bottom-up, the top-down, and most importantly, from the inside out. By engaging staff, students, leadership and faculty, all perspectives are included and the possibilities are endless.







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