



Workplace Wellness: An Employer's Guide to Promoting Wellness at the Workplace

Wellness issues important to you – brought to you by the insurance specialists at Lawson-Hawks Insurance Associates, Inc.

There are many different types of wellness programs. The essence of these programs is to encourage individuals to take preventive measures to avert the onset or worsening of an illness or disease and to adopt healthier lifestyles. Employers may utilize a wide range of wellness initiatives, from onsite gyms to simple wellness newsletters. While some businesses have instituted very comprehensive health programs, others have achieved savings or increased productivity with just a few simple activities that promote healthy behaviors. What's most important is to get started. Having a plan, along with one or two health promotion activities, can serve as a foundation for building a more comprehensive program down the road.

Why Promote Wellness in the Workplace?

Worksite health promotion is an investment in your most important asset, your employees. Studies have shown that employees are more likely to be on the job and performing well when they are in optimal physical and psychological health. Employees are also more likely to be attracted to, remain with, and value a company that values them. Worksite health promotion improves company productivity by:

- Attracting the most talented workers;
- Reducing absenteeism and lost time;
- Improving on-the-job time utilization and decision making; and
- Improving employee morale, which leads to a reduction in turnover.

In addition to improved productivity, wellness programs have proved to be an effective tool in slowing the growth of health care costs. Choosing healthier alternatives may reduce an employee's chances of suffering from disease. Less disease means employers can lower health plan use, thereby lowering health benefit costs, and in turn increasing the bottom line. While medical cost savings from health promotion programs may be less evident than productivity gains, studies show that medically high-risk employees are medically high-cost employees as they use more health care and generate higher claim costs.¹

Finally, by investing in worksite health, employers will be helping America achieve its two major Healthy People 2010² worksite-specific objectives:

1. 75 percent of all employers, regardless of size, offering a comprehensive employee health promotion program; and
2. 75 percent of all employees participating in employer-sponsored health promotion activities.

Best Practices When Developing a Wellness Program

The Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA), an organization dedicated to the promotion of worksite wellness, has identified the seven best practices (“The Seven C’s”) for employers to follow when building a comprehensive, effective worksite wellness program within their organization.³

1. **Capture senior-level support.** A commitment from the top is critical to the success of any wellness initiative. Management must understand the benefits of the program for both the employees and the organization and be willing to put funds towards its development, implementation and evaluation. Descriptions of what competitors are doing in the way of health promotion and linking health promotion to business goals, values and strategic priorities will help to secure senior management support. Managers who “walk the talk” and take part in the program will go a long way to driving others to participate as well.
2. **Create a wellness team.** Wellness teams should include a cross-section of potential program participants including employees. Your team should include individuals who will have a role in program development, implementation and evaluation. This ensures broad ownership of the program and more innovative ideas. A wellness team will help to garner “buy in” from both management and the participants, develop a program that is responsive to the needs of all potential participants, and will be responsible for overseeing all of the company’s wellness efforts.
3. **Collect data that will drive your health initiatives.** Once your team is in place and management is on board, it is time to gather baseline data to help assess employee health interests and risks. The results of your data collection will guide you in what kind of health programs to offer. This process may involve a survey of employee interest in various health initiatives, health risk assessments, and claims analysis to determine current employee disease risk.
4. **Craft an annual operating plan.** For your wellness program to succeed, you must have a plan. An annual operating plan should include a mission statement for the program along with specific, measurable short-and long-term goals and objectives. Your program is more likely to be successful if it is linked to one or more of the company’s strategic initiatives, as it will have a better chance of maintaining the support of management throughout the implementation process. A written plan also provides continuity when members of the wellness committee change and is instrumental in holding the team accountable to the goals, objectives, and timeline agreed upon.
5. **Choose appropriate health initiatives.** The health initiatives that you choose should flow naturally from your data (survey, HRA aggregate report, claims) to goals and objectives. They should address prevailing risk factors in your employee population and be in line with what both management and employees want from the wellness program.

6. **Create a supportive environment.** A supportive environment provides employees with encouragement, opportunity, and rewards. A culture of health that supports worksite health promotion might have such features as healthy food choices in their vending machines, a no-smoking policy and flexible work schedules that allow workers to exercise. A workplace that values health will celebrate and reward health achievements and have a management team that models healthy behavior. Most importantly, a culture of health involves employees in every aspect of the wellness program from their design and promotion to their implementation and evaluation.
7. **Consistently evaluate your outcomes.** Evaluation involves taking a close look at your goals and objectives and determining whether you achieved your desired result. Evaluation allows you to celebrate goals that have been achieved and to discontinue or change ineffective initiatives.

Developing an Operating Plan

One feature that all successful worksite wellness programs share is an outcome-oriented operating plan. An operating plan is important because it:

- Links wellness initiatives to company needs and strategic priorities;
- “Legitimizes” the program, which increases the likelihood of continued resources and support;
- Provides continuity for the program when personnel changes occur; and
- Serves as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs.

Your operating plan should contain the following elements:

1. **Vision Statement.** Your program must start here. All successful and long-lasting wellness programs, and organizations for that matter, have clear vision or mission statements. A vision statement is the envisioned future you are trying to achieve. It should include the values that drive the program along with the ultimate goals or accomplishments the program is trying to achieve. It should support the company’s overall mission statement. The following is an example of wellness program vision statement:
 - To improve the health and well-being of ABC Co. employee’s lives through health education and activities that will support positive lifestyle change thereby resulting in improved employee productivity and morale and healthcare cost savings for ABC Co.
2. **Goals.** Goals are the long-term accomplishments hoped to be achieved from the program. They are more likely to be accomplished when they are realistically set, reflect the needs of both management and employees, and flow naturally from the data collected. Goals should include clear time limits, so it is easy to determine whether or not the goal has been accomplished. The following is an example of a wellness program goal:
 - ABC Co. will reduce the prevalence of employee smoking from 35 percent to 25 percent by the end of the next fiscal year.
3. **Objectives.** Objectives are the tactics you will implement in order to achieve the stated goals. They should be written like goals so that it is clear whether or not they have been accomplished and include specific action steps along with a timeline for completion. The

following are examples of objectives that would each be supported by particular actions steps:

- By x date, ABC Co. will implement a smoke-free workplace policy.
 - By x date, ABC Co. will offer all employees a health risk appraisal and will follow up with smokers by x date.
 - By x date, ABC Co. will offer employees and their spouses smoking cessation classes to help them to quit smoking.
 - In November, ABC Co. will participate in the American Cancer's Society's Great American Smoke out.
4. **Timeline.** Develop a realistic timeline to both implement and evaluate the program. The timeline will incorporate key dates contained in the objectives and goals. Health promotion programs are generally kicked off at the start of the new year when people are making resolutions and then remarketed at least two more times throughout the year. Wellness activities should be scheduled at times that are convenient for all potential participants, so it may be necessary to offer multiple sessions including evening sessions.
5. **Budget.** It takes resources to carry out the objectives necessary to accomplish the program goals. Your program budget may include such items as salaries, program materials, administrative needs, outside vendors, evaluation and the costs associated with incentives used to drive participation. A comprehensive budget is essential during the evaluation process as program costs are compared to outcomes.
6. **Communication Plan.** You must communicate and market your program to increase employee awareness of the program and drive participation. Your operating plan should address the types of marketing efforts that will be used to inform your employees about your wellness plan. Specific communication techniques will vary depending on the size of your company and your budget. Some low-cost methods you can use to drive employee awareness and participation can be equally effective:
- Involve employees in the planning and implementation process;
 - Enroll the company president to encourage participation;
 - Use e-mail, bulletin boards, and company newsletters.
 - Make the program fun by starting with a creative name;
 - Provide incentives; and
 - Keep it simple and easy by making activities easy to sign up for and participate in.
7. **Implementation Plan.** This section of the operating plan will provide detailed information regarding when the various health promotion programs will be offered and will assign the individual responsibilities associated with the offerings.
8. **Evaluation Plan.** The final section of the operating plan will address how you will measure the success of your program. Ideally, evaluation will include both measuring how well the program is working and whether or not it is achieving its expected results. Participation counts along with participant evaluations and surveys will help you to answer who is using the program, what activities are most popular, whether the program met participants' needs and whether participants were satisfied with the program content.

You will measure your results by reviewing each program goal and determining whether that goal has been achieved. Using the example from above: Did the prevalence of smoking decrease by 10 percent by the end of the fiscal year? If not, why not? Was the goal realistic? Does the timeline need to be adjusted and objectives revised?

Implementing a wellness program requires careful planning. With good planning, your company can reap the benefits of workplace health promotion: healthier employees, reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, a boost in morale, and reduced health care costs. All of these benefits will contribute to keeping the company's bottom line fit and healthy.

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¹ Partnership for Prevention – www.prevent.org.

² Healthy People 2010 is America's major initiative to achieve important national health objectives by 2010. For more information see the Healthy People Website at <http://health.gov/healthypeople>.

³ For more information on the Wellness Councils of America, please see WELCOA's Website at www.welcoa.org.