

Workplace Wellness: A Strategic Solution

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 70% of deaths in America each year are a result of chronic diseases. Lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and excessive alcohol consumption are the top four risk behaviors associated with chronic disease. Among these, approximately 1/3 of all adults and almost 1 in 5 children ages six through nineteen are considered obese. Chronic disease resulting from these risk behaviors is *largely* preventable, but rising health care costs has become a major hindrance for this issue.

Wellness Programs Reduce Health Care Costs

Many employers have found that adopting and implementing a wellness program can significantly reduce health care costs through initiating healthy lifestyles for employees. A recent survey by GlobalFit found that about 86% of companies currently have a wellness program available to their employees. Results from a nine year study conducted by The University of Michigan indicated that We Energies saved a total of \$12.1 million through their wellness program; that amounted to approximately \$180 in savings for health care coverage per employee per year. Similarly, a recent study done by Baicker, Culter, and Song (2010) suggest that implementing a wellness program reduces health care costs by \$3.27 for every dollar invested. Additionally, costs associated with absenteeism can be reduced by \$2.73 per dollar invested.

Benefits Yielded Through Wellness

The results of numerous studies generate a reoccurring theme; wellness programs produce highly beneficial outcomes for companies who adopt and utilize them. Simply put, healthy employees are more productive employees. The key benefits that wellness programs achieve center around:

- Increased employee engagement
- Increased productivity of employees
- Decreased absenteeism
- Reduced health care costs

Remaining consistent in participation and having an outlook that is long-term are the means to achieving ROI. The participation rate for the We Energies study was about 40%, and the results indicated that a rate of 20% or lower would have had little effect on ROI.

The most desired outcomes of wellness programs can only be achieved through a high rate of employee participation over time.

How to Encourage Employees to Participate

If high rates of employee participation over time are the key to a successful wellness program, then how can this be achieved?

- Get employees involved in the planning stages.

One approach to enhancing employee participation is getting employees involved in the planning stages of the program. Sending out a pre-program survey, or conducting interviews that help determine employees' concerns, interests, or goals for wellness will help tailor the program specifically to the employees of that organization. Employees are far more likely to participate in a program that they feel they had a voice in creating.

- Cultivate a healthy workforce culture.

Companies that communicate a healthy workplace culture have found their participation rates to be significantly higher than companies who do not. According to the *15th Annual National Business Group on Health/Towers Watson Employer Survey*, employee participation in a health risk assessment (HRA) alone was approximately 29% higher when companies promoted a healthy culture. Aspects of a healthy workforce culture include healthy food in vending machines, employee sports teams sponsored by their organization, or a no-smoking policy.

- Get families involved in wellness.

Companies that communicate and emphasize health to their employees' families achieve very high rates of participation in wellness programs. When the whole family is involved with eating healthy and remaining active it is more likely that the employee will remain consistent with these behaviors as well.

- Lead by example.

One of the best ways to promote employee participation is for senior leadership to participate in wellness programs themselves. When managers understand the benefits associated with wellness programs they are more likely to be committed to the cause and may also put more effort into funding. Additionally, when leadership teams participate in these programs themselves, it often boosts engagement of other employees. Office morale can also be increased through workplace competition for weight loss or other healthy lifestyle office challenges.

Using a Holistic, Integrated Approach

FEI Behavioral Health has adopted a holistic, integrated approach to our wellness program, *Wellness Connections*; we believe there is a connection between physical, emotional and social well-being. This approach addresses health-related habits and behaviors in a context that includes the full spectrum of issues known to affect workplace productivity. Not only does this approach maximize the effectiveness of the individual services, it also helps employees understand their readiness and motivation to change. The benefits associated with this approach to wellness include:

- Maximizing health and well-being to lower health care costs
- Increasing productivity, engagement and retention
- Maximizing personal effectiveness and well-being to contribute to business growth
- Helping employees achieve personal health goals

FEI partners with you to protect and enhance your workforce effectiveness and organizational resiliency. We offer flexible solutions for the full spectrum of your workforce resilience goals, from EAP and wellness to crisis preparedness and management. We leverage our proven resources, compassionate experts and robust network to improve your employees' focus, empower your managers and prepare you to handle the unthinkable crisis, so that you can maintain a healthy, resilient organization.