



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

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There are many different types of wellness programs. The essence of these programs is to promote healthy lifestyles wellness initiatives such as smoking cessation programs, on-site gyms, educational materials and much more. 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 commit to wellness promotion in your organization and get started.

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 health. Benefits of implementing a wellness program include:

- Attracting the most talented workers
- Reducing absenteeism and lost time
- Improving on-the-job time utilization, decision making and productivity
- Improving employee morale
- Reduction in turnover
- Improved disease management and prevention, and a healthier workforce in general, both of which contribute to lower health care costs

Best Practices When Developing a Wellness Program

The Wellness Council of America (WELCOA), an organization dedicated to the promotion of worksite wellness, has identified seven best practices ("The Seven Benchmarks") for

employers to follow when building a comprehensive, effective worksite wellness program within their organization.¹

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 commit sufficient funding. Link health promotion to business goals, values and strategic priorities, and emphasize improved employee productivity and health care cost savings.
2. **Create a wellness team.** Wellness teams should include a cross-section of people from all levels of your company, to ensure broad ownership of the program, help garner buy-in from the rest of the company, and make sure the program is responsive to the needs of all participants. These individuals will drive program development, implementation and evaluation.
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, which will guide you in crafting your program. 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.** An annual operating plan is important for your program's success and should include a mission statement along with specific, measurable short- and long-term goals and objectives. Your program is also 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. 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) and be cohesive with your 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 might have such features as healthy food choices in the vending machines, a no-smoking policy and flexible work schedules that allow workers to exercise. Also, your workplace should celebrate and reward health achievements and have a management team that models healthy behavior. Most importantly, be sure to involve employees in every aspect of the wellness program from its design and promotion to its implementation and evaluation.
7. **Consistently evaluate your outcomes.** Evaluation involves taking a close look at your goals and objectives to determine 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
- Serves as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs

Your operating plan should contain the following elements:

1. **Vision Statement.** All successful and long-lasting wellness programs, and organizations for that matter, have clear vision or mission statements. A vision statement 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 a sample wellness program vision statement:
 - To improve the health and well-being of ABC Co. employees through health education and activities that support healthy lifestyles, thereby resulting in improved employee productivity, morale and health care cost savings for ABC Co.
2. **Goals.** Goals are the long-term accomplishments hoped to be achieved from the program. To be attainable they should be 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 to achieve the stated goals. Like goals, they should be written so that it is clear whether or not they have been accomplished and include specific action steps and timelines. The following are examples of objectives that support the sample goal above:
 - 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 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 generally begin at the start of the New Year when people are making resolutions and then are remarketed at least twice throughout the year. Wellness activities should be scheduled at times that are convenient for all participants, so it may be necessary to offer multiple sessions, including evening sessions.
5. **Budget.** It takes resources to implement a wellness program. Your budget may include such items as salaries, program materials, administrative needs, outside vendors, evaluation and the costs associated with incentives. A comprehensive budget is essential during the evaluation process as program costs are compared to outcomes.

6. **Communication Plan.** You must communicate 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 effective but low-cost methods are:

- Involve employees in the planning and implementation process
- Involve 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
- 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 about implementing the various health promotion programs and will assign individual responsibilities associated with the offerings.

Evaluation Plan. The final section 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 rate, participant evaluations and surveys are good evaluation tools. Also measure your results by reviewing each program goal and determining if it 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 to ensure 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.

¹ For more information on the Wellness Council of America, please see WELCOA's Web site at www.welcoa.org

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