

How to Start a Workplace Wellness Program?

It makes good business sense to have a workplace wellness program. Workplace wellness programs play a key role in improving the health of employees and can actually save companies money. From an employers' perspective, these programs improve both the physical and mental health of their employees. They also enhance motivation, job performance, productivity and morale among employees. Further, wellness programs have been shown to reduce absenteeism, staff turnover and rates of accidents/injuries (Blake & Lloyd, 2008). In fact, for every dollar invested in workplace wellness, medical healthcare costs have been shown to fall approximately \$3.27 and absenteeism costs drop \$2.73 (Baicker, Cutler & Song, 2010). That's more than a five dollar return for each dollar invested.

Consider the following steps when starting your companies' workplace wellness program.

1. **Confirm management support** – Management support is the first and most crucial step in starting a workplace wellness program. You can obtain management support by presenting the 'business case' for having a wellness program. Management need to understand the cost savings and benefits for their employees and company.
2. **Create a healthy workplace committee-** The committees' job will be to plan and implement the workplace wellness program. It is important to align the workplace wellness program with health and safety. Therefore, health and safety as well as employee group or union representatives should be part of this committee. Also, look for employees who are interested in promoting a positive/healthier environment in their workplace to include on this committee.
3. **Find out employee interests and ideas-** It is important to listen to the employees' feedback and interests. This will increase participation in the program and help focus your activities.
4. **Come up with a healthy workplace plan-** This should include the mission, vision and values of the program. Also, include the goals, objectives, activities and evaluation plan of the workplace wellness program.
5. **Realistic resources-** Ensure you take into consideration the required resources, whether staff time or financial, in supporting activities or events. Budget some company funds! You should also become familiar with community agencies or organizations that can provide workplace wellness services.
6. **Carry out the plan and have fun-** Make the program fun and easy for the employees as well as management to increase participation and benefits to the company.
7. **Small Changes add up-** The greatest benefit from your wellness program will be best realized if many of your employees begin to make small improvements to their lifestyles rather than having a few employees make larger changes.
8. **Celebrate success-** Consider becoming recognized for your workplace wellness program through the *Working Toward Wellness* Healthy Workplace Awards.

A workplace wellness program doesn't have to be complicated. All it takes is support from management and employee groups, a will to succeed, a reasonable allocation of resources (i.e., human and financial) to carry out the program.

The Windsor- Essex County Health Unit and Go For Health Windsor-Essex offer internationally recognized comprehensive workplace wellness program options to interested Windsor-Essex County businesses. Contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 519- 258-2148 ext. 3100, or online at, www.wehealthunit.org/workplace-health for more information on the *Working*

Toward Wellness workplace wellness program. We can partner to improve the health of employees, retirees, their families and beyond.

Key References

Baicker, K., Cutler, D., & Song, Z. (2010). Workplace wellness programs can generate savings. *Health Affairs*, 29(2), 304-311.

Blake, H., and Lloyd, S. (2008). Influencing organizational change in the NHS: lessons learned from workplace wellness initiatives in practice. *Quality in Primary Care*, 16, 449-455.

The Health Communication Unit. (2004). *An introduction to comprehensive workplace health promotion*. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from http://www.thcu.ca/workplace/documents/intro_to_workplace_health_promotion_v1.1.FINAL.pdf