

Wellness Policy as a Business Investment!

Investing in the health and wellbeing of employees and their families can save your company money. In fact, a recent study found that for each dollar invested in workplace wellness programs, medical costs dropped by \$3.27 and absenteeism costs dropped by \$2.73 (Baicker, Cutler & Song, 2010). A significant part of a workplace wellness program is wellness policy development. As such, it's important to understand what a wellness policy is, and the benefits of developing one or more in your workplace. This way you can help ensure a healthier, more productive and profitable business.

What is a policy?

A policy is defined as “a course or principal of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business or individuals” (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 1998). Policies provide a guideline to action on a specific issue by stating rules and expectations.

Benefits of a wellness policy

One of the most important benefits of a wellness policy is making healthy choices the easiest choices for employees to make (The Health Communication Unit, 2004). A clear example, of this is a healthy meetings policy which ensures that employees have nutritious, healthy choices (e.g., fruit, milk for coffee) instead of less nutritious choices (e.g., doughnuts, crème for coffee) at company meetings. Key advantages of having wellness policies in addition to programs include:

- **Sustainable** – Policy is long lasting. While decision makers and programs come and go, policies are in place for the long-term.
- **Equitable** – Policy is fair because everyone has to follow the same rules and guidelines.
- **Wide Reach** – Policy reaches all of the employees in the company. The focus is on everyone, not just individuals in the company.
- **Changes Company Culture** – Policy can help make the company employees believe that being healthier is essential.

(Brownson, Haire-Joshu & Luke, 2006)

Developing a wellness policy

Commitment from company employers is key to the wellness policy development process (Blake and Lloyd, 2008). In fact, when employers are committed to the wellness policy being developed, long-term change is more likely to occur (Blake and Lloyd, 2008). When developing a wellness policy it's important to ensure that the following components are included:

- A preamble describing the purpose of the policy.
- The goals and objectives of the policy.
- Core policy content such as rules, permits, and related activities.
- The course of action to be taken if an individual does not comply with the policy.
- A plan to monitor the policy to ensure that it's suited for the company needs and is being implemented properly.

Go For Health Windsor-Essex is a community based coalition focused on creating healthy vibrant community through policy development. Windsor-Essex County Health Unit (WECHU), Go For Health Windsor-Essex and our community partners are working together with business leaders in the community to help improve the health of everyone around us. Contact WECHU at 519- 258-2146 ext. 3100, or online at www.wechealthunit.org/workplace-health or www.goforhealth.ca for

more information on the *Working Toward Wellness* workplace wellness program. With workplace wellness policies we can create a healthier Windsor-Essex County.

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.

Brownson, R.C., Haire-Joshu, D., & Luke, D.A. (2006). Shaping the context of health: A review of environmental and policy approaches in the prevention of chronic diseases. *Annual Reviews Public Health*, 27, 341-370.

The Health Communication Unit. (2004). *Developing health promotion policies*. Retrieved June 7, 2011 from <http://www.mdfilestorage.com/thcu/pubs/539372877.pdf>