

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

Workplace wellness is an investment in your most important asset—your employees. Studies have shown that employees are more likely to perform well when they are in optimal health. The following are benefits of implementing a wellness program:

- Enhanced recruiting by attracting the most talented workers
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved on-the-job time utilization, decision-making and productivity
- Improved employee morale
- Reduction in turnover

## Best Practices When Developing a Wellness Plan

The Wellness Council of America (WELCOA), an organization dedicated to the promotion of worksite wellness, has identified seven best practices for employers to follow when building a successful workplace wellness program.

1. **Create committed and aligned leadership.** A commitment from the top is key to the success of any wellness initiative. Management must understand the benefits of a wellness program for both the employees and the organization, and be willing to commit sufficient funding.
2. **Foster collaboration in support of wellness.** Wellness teams should include a variety of people from all levels of your company. These individuals will drive program development, implementation and evaluation. Consider recruiting employees from human resources, legal, marketing, management and administrative staff.
3. **Collect meaningful data that will drive your health initiatives and wellness strategy.** Gathering data to assess employee health interests and risks will help guide you in developing your program. This process may involve conducting a survey of employee interest in various health initiatives, health risk assessments (HRAs) and claims analysis to determine your current employees' disease risk.
4. **Craft an 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. A written plan 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 that support the whole employee.** The health initiatives that you choose should flow naturally from your data (survey, HRA aggregate report, claims), be cohesive with your goals and objectives and be in line with what both management and employees want from the wellness program.
6. **Create a supportive environment, policies and practices.** A supportive environment provides employees with encouragement, opportunity and rewards. 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 various aspect of the wellness program from its design and promotion to its implementation and evaluation.
7. **Conduct evaluations, communicate, celebrate and iterate.** 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 to your business for the following reasons:

- 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:

- **Vision Statement.** All successful and long-lasting wellness programs have clear vision or mission statements. A mission statement should include the values that drive the program along with the ultimate goals or accomplishments the program hopes to achieve. 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.
- **Goals.** Goals are the long-term accomplishments to be achieved from the program. To be attainable they should be realistic, 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% to 25% by the end of the next fiscal year.
- **Objectives.** Objectives are the strategies you will implement to achieve your goals. Like goals, they should include specific action steps and timelines, and be written so that it is clear whether or not they have been accomplished. 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.
- **Timeline.** Develop a realistic timeline to implement and evaluate the program. The timeline will incorporate key dates contained in the objectives and goals. Wellness initiatives generally begin at the start of the new year when people are making resolutions. They are then 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.
- **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 detailed budget is essential during the evaluation process as program costs are compared to outcomes.
- **Communication Plan.** You must communicate your program to raise employee awareness of the program and drive participation. Your operating plan should address the types of marketing efforts that will be used to inform employees about your wellness plan. Specific communication techniques will vary depending on the size of your company and your budget. The following are effective but low-cost communication methods:
  - Involve employees in the planning and implementation process
  - Involve the company president to encourage participation
  - Use email, intranet postings, bulletin boards and company newsletters
  - Make the program fun by using with a creative name and providing incentives
- **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 should address how you will measure the success of your program. Ideally, evaluation will include measuring how well the program is working and whether it is achieving its expected results. Participation rate, participant evaluations and surveys are good evaluation tools.
  - Evaluations can also include taking additional employee surveys and periodically analyzing health claims data, and comparing this data to what you collected prior to the wellness program to gauge progress. Below is an evaluation using the goals and objectives mentioned above:
    - Did the prevalence of smoking decrease by 10% 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?

For more information on the Wellness Council of America, please see WELCOA's website at [www.welcoa.org](http://www.welcoa.org).

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