

Enhancing the Return on Your Wellness Investment

According to the Wellness Council of America (WELCOA), the majority of health care costs treat preventable chronic conditions. Depending on the health of your employees, this can generate huge, unwanted costs for both you and your workers. Targeting and helping prevent chronic conditions among your workforce can significantly reduce your health care costs.

As with any major business initiative, the driving factor in developing a wellness program is attaining a strong return on investment (ROI). If your program is successful, your employees will be healthier and will have fewer medical claims. In addition, if you are self-insured, dollars saved from your wellness program can improve your bottom line. If self-insurance is not an option for your organization, you can inform your insurance company of your wellness efforts in an attempt to negotiate a lower premium.

In addition to rising health care costs, absenteeism and presenteeism also affect employer profits. Employees are generally physically absent from work due to stress, illness, family obligations or personal issues. Presenteeism refers to employees who show up to work but cannot fully focus on their tasks due to being sick, sleep-deprived or distracted by personal problems. Wellness programs can address these issues by helping to lower stress, prevent illness and increase employee morale.

If you know how much you are spending on health care, you can estimate how much you are spending on absenteeism and presenteeism using the following calculations:

- Absenteeism: $0.2 \times$ your annual health care cost
- Presenteeism: $1.8 \times$ your annual health care cost

What Yields The Best ROI?

There are many strategies that you can implement to increase the ROI of your wellness programs.

Use Your Insurance Plan to its Fullest

Your insurance plan is required to provide free preventive care benefits for members, spouses and dependents, such as cancer screenings, Pap smears, mammograms, annual physicals and routine immunizations. These benefits cost employees nothing out of pocket and can help catch conditions early and prevent future costly claims.

To encourage employees to seek preventive care, send age-appropriate screening reminders, provide vaccination sign-ups for employees and have outside vendors come on-site to provide screenings. When communicating with employees, keep messages positive and constructive by reinforcing how preventive care can improve their health and lower future medical bills.

Create a Targeted Plan

Identify the biggest problem areas among your employees. Do you have many smokers? Are some employees struggling with obesity? Choose the areas with the highest prevalence rates to create your initial wellness program. Keep in mind that you can always add more initiatives later, once your program has launched.

Ask employees what programs would benefit them the most. Would they like access to on-site fitness facilities, or would they prefer discount programs for local gyms? Do they want more education on healthy eating and exercising? Tailor your program to fit your employees' needs, and they will be more likely to participate.

Make Workplace Modifications and New Policies

Implement changes in your workplace to promote healthy living, such as a "Take the Stairs" program, offering healthier vending machine choices or starting a walking group during lunch. If you plan annual company outings, consider adding a fitness component, such as a 5K run or walk or a company softball game.

Communicate Benefits to Your Employees

Instead of emphasizing how your wellness initiatives will benefit the organization, highlight the benefits for your employees. Send out positive messages such as "You will feel better," "You'll have more energy," or "You'll lower your future health care costs."

Utilize Community Resources

Make the most of community resources from nonprofit organizations, your county health department, the chamber of commerce, local health care providers and your city government. These organizations can provide resources for workplace wellness events, and some will even provide wellness grants to promote their services.

Support and Evaluate Your Program

In order to have an effective wellness program, you need to make an effort to sustain and support it. You should have a team responsible for managing the program to ensure wellness efforts remain a priority. ROI generally does not occur until two to three years into the program, so it is important to remind upper management of that in order to maintain their buy-in.

Periodically evaluate your wellness program. Survey employees to see if they are satisfied and identify areas for improvement. Look for ways to increase participation or to further the initiatives you have put in place.

Use the tips above to increase your wellness program's ROI. For more information on calculating ROI, contact 1706 Advisors.

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