

Sourcing Data to Enhance Your Wellness Program

Before implementing a workplace wellness program, it is important to collect data to determine exactly where to focus your efforts for the biggest return on your investment. There are three main resources for collecting wellness information: employee health risk assessments (HRAs), health culture audits and personal interest surveys.

These tools can provide you with insight into the health and wellness needs of your employees so you can design a wellness program that resonates best with your employees.

Health Risk Assessments

HRAs are electronic or paper health questionnaires that ask a series of questions about one's medical history and lifestyle to identify health risks. HRAs typically include three components: a questionnaire, a risk calculation and an education report.

Some health plan providers and health care systems offer HRA programs for the workplace. As a general rule, it is usually best for an employer to hire an outside vendor to administer HRAs. When selecting an HRA vendor, it is important to look for an experienced company affiliated with reputable organizations. The vendor should be able to ensure compliance with applicable laws and has the proper security measures in place to protect your employees' data.

Vendors will then supply an HRA report and give feedback to employees. Medical information obtained as part of the HRA must be kept confidential. Generally, employers may only receive medical information in aggregate form that does not disclose, and is not reasonably likely to disclose, the identity of specific employees.

If you decide to offer an HRA, communicate to your employees ahead of time about the benefits of HRAs—whether via email, intranet postings, posters, etc. In addition, consider providing incentives, such as gift certificates or monetary rewards, to encourage employees to fill out an HRA.

Health Culture Audits

Health culture audits help determine how your company's culture relates to your employees' health and productivity. This audit assesses items such as health norms and your employees' attitudes about health and well-being as it relates to your company. Results from this audit help determine how your workplace can be supportive of healthy behaviors.

Personal Interest Surveys

A personal interest survey is designed to uncover the interests and health needs of your employees. While there are a variety of survey methods, one that may be helpful is the Likert scale, which asks employees to rank items from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Survey results can then be used to identify which initiatives employees would most like to see implemented in the workplace. Asking for input makes employees feel like their opinions are valued, which may make them more inclined to participate in wellness activities in the future.

By using these data collection tools, you can gather the information you need to evaluate your wellness program and modify your initiatives to increase employee engagement and increase your return on investment.

NOTE: Health information collected through a wellness program, including a health risk assessment, is subject to confidentiality restrictions under federal law. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA) each include rules to protect the privacy or confidentiality of employees' health information. Check with legal counsel if you are unsure whether your program complies with applicable law.

