

## Step 1: Build Your Case

A worksite wellness program is an organized approach to making the work environment, policies and programs support employee health and encourage positive lifestyle behaviors such as increased physical activity, improved healthy eating, reduced tobacco exposure, and reduced stress.

During the past decade, health promotion at the worksite has spread rapidly. About 80 percent of all employers with 50 or more employees now offer some form of health promotion program.

### A. Why take on worksite wellness?

It's wise for employers to invest in worksite health promotion. A healthy, motivated employee is vitally important to a workplace as a whole and has a significant impact on an employer's bottom line. An investment in worksite health promotion:

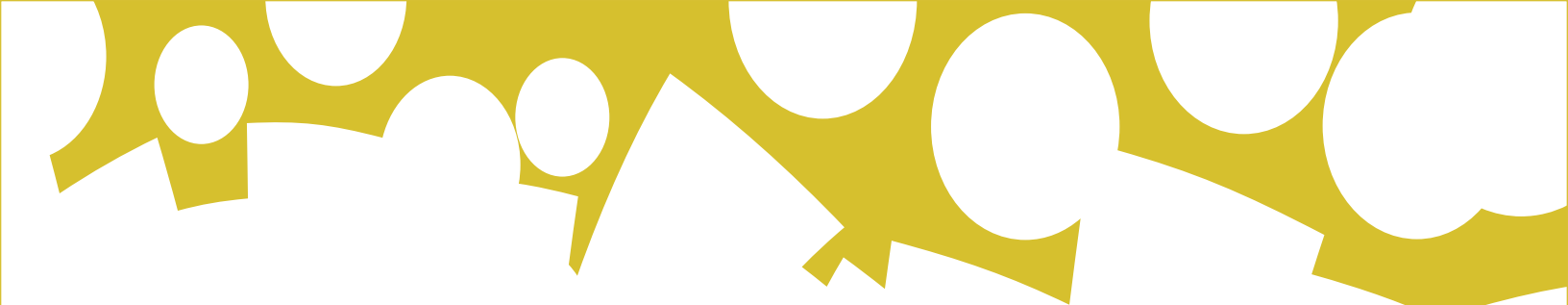
- Improves employees' health, productivity and quality of life
- Assists in the management of the cost of health care, benefits and insurance
- Creates a desirable work environment

**“A wake-up call for corporate America is that an employee health care cost crisis is here. If the employer assumes the responsibility to pay for the diagnosis and treatment of employee/dependent illness, then serious consideration must be given to the reallocation of existing investment in human capital funds. This redirection of funding should be toward health enhancement programs and services that optimize employee/dependent health, which can reduce health care use, moderate cost increases, reduce illness absence and improve work performance”.**<sup>1</sup>

### Employee health is at risk

The current human and economic cost of poor health is devastating. Employees with modifiable risks accounted for 25% medical expenditures.<sup>2</sup> An example of the health status of Minnesota adults is shown in the table below.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many of us fall within more than one risk category.

Risk Factor	Percentage of MN adults with Risk Factor
Told by a physician they have hypertension	22%
Current smokers	20%
Not exercising at least 30 minutes per day	49%
No leisure-time physical activity	16%
Not eating at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day	76%
Reporting a Body Mass Index (BMI) classified as overweight	38%
Reporting a BMI classified as obese	25%



Minnesota loses \$2.6 billion annually from health care expenditures and lost productivity caused by tobacco-related illnesses.<sup>4</sup> In the year 2000, an estimated \$495 million were spent in Minnesota treating diseases and conditions that would be avoided if all Minnesotan adults were physically active.

### **Major health risks are modifiable.**

The good news is many health risks—overweight, lack of physical activity, poor food choices, tobacco exposure and use, stress and alcohol—can be modified and improved. Unfortunately, as awareness has grown about the health risks of serious chronic disease, most Americans have not changed their lifestyles to reduce their risk of illness or prevent disease. Changing one's lifestyle is hard and therefore, many individuals would welcome outside support to modify their high-risk behaviors.

**Forty-two to 55% of the State of Minnesota employees completing a health assessment in 2006 and reporting low levels of physical activity were seriously thinking of becoming more active, and 51-61% of employees reporting unhealthy stress were seriously thinking about making changes to manage their stress.**

### **Worksite wellness programs are proving effective in improving employees' health and productivity.**

In 11 literature reviews, health promotion programs have been found to be effective in improving employee health risks. These changes are typically seen within 6 to 12 months.<sup>5</sup> A 2005 meta-analysis update provided a systematic look at the quality of the economic literature for multi-component worksite health promotion programs. The summary of evidence is very strong for average reduction in sick leave, health plan costs, workers compensation and disability costs of slightly more than 25%. Worksite health promotion represents one of the most significant strategies for enhancing productivity of American workers.<sup>6</sup>

A comprehensive health promotion program strives to reach all employees, from those who are healthy to those who are sick. While statistically, 5% of employees account for 80% of the health care costs, the individuals who populate this expensive bracket change over time. People will move in and out of this high risk group. While it's important to support those that are very ill, it is also especially important to keep your healthy individuals healthy.<sup>7</sup>

### **Worksite health promotion yields a positive return on investment (ROI).**

A worksite wellness program can help employers manage the cost of health care, benefits and insurance by providing a positive ROI. The annual return on investment for worksite wellness programs has been \$3-\$6 saved for every \$1 spent or a ROI of 3-6:1. But an employer must be committed: it takes about 2 to 5 years after the initial program investment to realize these savings.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

## B. Explore past and current worksite wellness initiatives

Before building a worksite wellness program, it's important to explore what's been done in the past (good and bad), as well as what's currently happening at the worksite. Conduct an assessment of your workplace to begin to understand what has happened in the past, what is currently in place and what employees would like to see in the future to support health and wellness.

In your review, consider the workplace culture, leadership support, facilities, communication methods, current wellness programming, existing employee benefits and your ability to access data to evaluate your program.

This assessment may be done through:

- ❖ Focus groups
- ❖ Survey of total employee population or a representative sample, and/or
- ❖ Checklist

Sample checklist: [www.the-hero.org/scorecard.htm](http://www.the-hero.org/scorecard.htm)

## C. Gain management support

It is necessary to create a worksite health promotion program that has support from all levels within the organization. This support will help build a culture of wellness in the workplace, as well as support employee participation in programs and time infringements on the work day. Senior level executives control the budget, the organizational agenda and the communication channels.

To gain and keep support of management, practice the following:

- ❖ **Share data** – Worksite health promotion is a fast-growing field. Keep abreast of the current best practices and programs that are demonstrating a positive ROI. Share recent research developments with management.
- ❖ **Evaluate** – Continually evaluate your programs and initiatives. Share participation numbers, testimonials, absenteeism rates and claims data to keep management updated on successes.
- ❖ **Keep lines of communication open** – Stay attuned to the effects your health promotion initiatives have on work flow, productivity and employee morale. It is important to address any concern up-front.

## D. Worksite health promotion resources

Art of Health Promotion newsletter

[www.healthpromotionjournal.com/publications/art.htm](http://www.healthpromotionjournal.com/publications/art.htm)

CDC's Healthier Worksite Initiative

[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/hwi/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/hwi/index.htm)

Health Enhancement Research Organization (Hero) ThinkTank

[www.the-hero.org](http://www.the-hero.org)

Northland ACSM Worksite Health Promotion Group

[www.d.umn.edu/~nacsml/](http://www.d.umn.edu/~nacsml/)

Park Nicollet HealthSource  
<http://www.parknicollet.com/healthsource/>

StayWell  
[www.staywell.com/](http://www.staywell.com/)

Wellness Councils of America (WELCOA)  
[www.welcoa.com/presskit/index.php](http://www.welcoa.com/presskit/index.php)

Your employees' health plan

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