

Wellness and Health Promotion Programs:

Wellness Program Development Pointers

Steps in Developing Wellness Programs

Developing a cost-effective wellness program that employees will use requires careful planning. Steps employers should following to implement wellness programs include:

- assessing the workplace from a wellness perspective,
- assessing employees' needs,
- setting program goals, and
- developing the program.

A task force can be appointed to develop a wellness program. The task force should include managers and employees, employee benefits staff, and communications personnel to obtain different points of view about plan options.

Assessing the Workplace

In assessing the workplace from a wellness perspective employers should examine the following issues:

- What occupational health and safety hazards exist?
- Are employee work areas safe and comfortable, or is there risk of muscle strain or repetitive motion injuries?
- Are employees exposed to hazardous substances?
- What are the existing company policies on smoking, alcohol and substance abuse, first-aid training, and other health-related topics?
- Does the company cafeteria offer healthful menu choices?

Assessing Employee Needs

To determine employees' needs and interests, employers should conduct a confidential survey that gathers information on:

- employees' age, gender, and major health complaints;
- sick leave use and absenteeism;
- disability claims, including number and type;
- on- and off-the-job accidents, including type and frequency; and
- employees' attitudes toward health, health education, and fitness.

Survey results can be used to identify the kinds of activities workers would prefer, the number of possible participants, and efforts needed to spur involvement.

Setting Program Goals

Once the workplace is assessed and current policies and survey information are gathered, specific short- and long-term goals for the program can be established. Is the main goal helping employees? Lowering health care costs? Improving morale and productivity? Answering questions like these can help employers choose the options that best meet their goals. Once a program is developed a means of measuring progress toward such goals should be designed.

Developing the Program

The wellness options chosen should appeal to a majority of employees. For example, if the program's emphasis is disease prevention, it might not appeal to younger employees who are healthier and might prefer fitness programs. Meanwhile, employees with dependent care responsibilities might not be able to take advantage of fitness centers that only offer before- or after-work hours. Thus, programs that offer more than one option increase participation.

Since the options chosen also will depend on available funds, the task force should cost out different options and determine which will fit within the company's budget.

Once a program is chosen, the task force should create a set of goals for evaluating and improving the program. Some employers opt to offer a pilot program to help assess a program's success. Once the program has been evaluated, it can be revised and expanded if necessary to broaden its appeal to employees or to limit its cost.