

## Healthy workplaces

'read out'

Interest in workplace health promotion is driven by changes in the management of occupational health and safety. Health and productivity gains are not only related to what safety procedures are put in place but how the issues are approached. The process of establishing a health and wellness program in the workplace offers a positive method by which organisations can better manage the health of the workforce.

### What is a healthy, active workplace?

A healthy, active workplace is one that:

- Is proactive
- Values health and wellbeing
- Actively encourages workers to be active
- Increases opportunities to be healthy and active
- Supports workers to make healthy choices
- Integrates health and wellbeing practices into organisational culture and structure
- Employs a wide range of strategies designed to improve the health and wellbeing of workers

'ask'

**Q. What are the benefits to establishing a healthy active workplace to both the organisation and the individual?**

### Possible answers:

#### Benefits to workers:

- *Improved mental health*
- *Improved physical health*
- *Improved concentration*
- *Improved relations with co-workers*
- *Decreased risk factors*
- *Enriched lives*

#### Benefits to employers

- *Improve corporate image*
- *Decrease injury*
- *Decrease absenteeism*
- *Decrease compensation claims*
- *Improved productivity*
- *Boost staff morale*
- *Attraction and retention*

Studies show that a comprehensive health and wellbeing program can provide a return on investment of \$3 for every \$1 spent. Overweight, unhealthy and inactive people have an affect on occupational safety and health outcomes through:

- Increased injury severity, duration and medical costs
- Increased injury and illness incidence
- Increased absenteeism, lower productivity and work limitations
- Increased musculoskeletal disorders
- Workers less likely to remain in the workforce above 55 years of age

### **So where do we start?**

A comprehensive workplace health and wellbeing program should consist of more than just lunch time physical activity classes. It can address all areas of health and wellbeing including physical activity nutrition, mental health, smoking, substance abuse and active transport.

The key to a successful program lies in it being embedded in a strategy that addresses the following six areas:

1. Raising awareness - Education and information is the key to encouraging people to participate
2. Offering participation opportunities e.g. lunchtime classes, before or after work
3. Providing facilities and environments e.g. Providing a space for exercise
4. Integrating health and wellbeing into organisation policies
5. Having a supportive management
6. Doing regular evaluations of the strategy

Here is a case study of an organisation that introduced a wellness program into their workplace.

Previously the organisation had tried wellness initiatives but there was no structured program. So they conducted a needs analysis to find out what people were interested in. Then they gained the support of the Executive Director and a commitment to subsidise some of the activities to encourage participation. Once programs were established they made sure staff knew their participation was crucial to expansion of the wellness program.

One of the key factors for implementation was to work around existing activities and not do too many things at once. Some of the things they introduced included:

- Starting a lunchtime walking group
- Lunchtime sessions of yoga, Pilates, tai chi
- Implementing a use the stairs campaign
- Healthy eating advice posters
- Stress buster posters
- Articles in staff newsletter

- Promote local events - City to surf fun run, Walk to work day

To provide a supportive environment they

- Ensured that the company policy included the promotion of a healthy workplace
- Put in bike racks
- Provided access to stairwells for stair walking
- Let staff use flexi time to do programs
- Had fruit for sale at reception at a cheap price

They worked within the budget

- The costs for each program were worked out, For example free health checks - heart, cholesterol, weight, blood sugar and lifestyle assessments.
- The costs for subsidising lunchtime activities were shared between staff and the organisation.

They promoted the motivating factors. Things like feeling mentally awake, decreasing stress, getting fit, sleeping better etc.

They evaluated their results by:

- Follow up health heart checks to determine changes to health / fitness of staff
- Follow up with another needs analysis survey
- Recording participation rates as evidence of the success of the strategy

The organisation considers the program a success as they have 60% participation of staff in the activities (not all staff do everything) and absences on sick leave have also decreased slightly. People are reporting that they are more productive on the days that they participate and are seeing changes in weight and energy levels.

'ask'

**Q. Before I finish, is there anything that you can identify that we could be doing in this workplace to encourage a healthy lifestyle?**

*Take notes about suggestions...don't panic if there aren't any takers.*

'read out'

OK, unless anyone has any questions, thanks for listening to me.

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