

# Workplaces for Wellness



## Step 1. Management commitment

### Make a case for your program

Develop a business case to show why your workplace will benefit from a wellness program. Highlight the advantages and costs and review what other workplaces have done.

#### 1. Highlight the advantages

##### Employees feel healthier, happier and appreciated

###### Benefits include:

- › a safer and healthier working environment
- › reduced risk of accidents and ill health
- › practical support to help employees improve their health
- › better employee/manager relations
- › improved morale and motivation
- › improved quality of life.

###### In the short-term, you should see:

- › improved employee relations
- › a positive workplace image
- › reduced work-related ill health
- › a healthier work culture.

###### Longer-term benefits include:

- › improved employee health
- › a decrease in absenteeism and employee turnover
- › an increase in morale and motivation
- › greater productivity
- › enhanced recruitment of quality employees
- › lower workers compensation costs
- › enhanced corporate image
- › improved health of the wider community.

**The healthiest Australians are almost three times more productive than their unhealthy colleagues.<sup>1</sup>**

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### Greater productivity

Healthier employees can be more productive and have better lifestyles. Employees with poorer overall health are far more likely to be absent from work. They are also 9 times more likely to take sick days, compared with healthy employees.

Comparison of the Australian worker	
Healthy workers	Unhealthy workers
Lifestyle behaviours include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Healthy, balanced diet</li> <li>› Actively manages stress levels</li> <li>› Sound sleep patterns</li> <li>› Fit, energetic and alert</li> <li>› Healthy body weight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› High-fat diet</li> <li>› Poor stress management</li> <li>› Irregular sleep patterns</li> <li>› Low energy and poor concentration</li> <li>› Overweight or obese</li> </ul>
Workplace behaviours include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Self-rated performance 8.5 out of 10</li> <li>› 143 effective hours full-time each month</li> <li>› 2 days sick leave per year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Self-rated performance 3.7 out of 10</li> <li>› 49 effective hours full-time each month</li> <li>› 18 days sick leave per year</li> </ul>

Source: Medibank Private 2005<sup>1</sup>

### Fewer accidents

Physical fitness, absence of chronic disease and positive mental health are associated with low work injury rates.<sup>2</sup> Getting more exercise and more sleep can help to improve concentration. Flexible work options can aid social and emotional wellness.

### Strongly supported by research

There is extensive research on the benefits of a healthy workforce. Researchers have found that workplaces with a wellness program can reduce their employees' health risk factors by up to 56%—at a rate of 10% per year.<sup>3</sup>

### Return on investment

From studies, we know that workplace wellness programs are an investment rather than a cost. US researchers have shown a cost saving of US\$5.81 for every US\$1 investment in workplace health promotion.<sup>4</sup> The investment you make doesn't have to be large—some programs can be run at no or low cost by having existing employees drive the program.

### Better health for families and the community

Healthy behaviours formed during work hours can continue outside of work. Family and friends may also adopt healthier behaviours, which could benefit the workplace. For example, having healthier family members can mean less carer's leave is needed.

### 2. Add up the costs

#### Three million reasons

More than 3 million Australians suffer from chronic disease.<sup>5</sup> That's around 1 in 7 people. Reducing chronic disease has benefits for the individual, families, workplaces and the community.

#### Absenteeism

An effective workplace wellness program can reduce absenteeism by up to 30%.<sup>8</sup>

Employees with healthier lifestyle behaviours take 2 days of sick leave per year compared with 18 days for employees with unhealthier lifestyles.<sup>1</sup> Australian workplaces also lose around 4 million days per year due to obesity.<sup>6</sup> Around 2.5 million days are lost due to personal alcohol consumption.<sup>7</sup>

#### Obesity has a price

In 2008, obesity cost Australia around \$8.3 billion with \$3.6 billion (44%) due to losses in workplace productivity.<sup>9</sup> (This didn't include people considered overweight).

#### Too much sun

Employees need to be aware of the dangers of unsafe sun exposure. In 2010, more than 300 Queenslanders died of skin cancer (melanoma) and around 3000 new cases were diagnosed.<sup>10</sup>

#### Too much stress

Stressful work environments, long work hours and low morale contribute to absenteeism and can have a negative affect on social and emotional wellbeing. In Australia, each worker loses an average of 3.2 days each year because of workplace stress.<sup>11</sup>

#### Taking a back seat to technology

An increase in desk-based jobs and automated machinery can negatively influence our health. Being sedentary is associated with increased health risks, even if the recommended amount of 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days is achieved.<sup>10</sup>

#### Review the achievements of others

The arguments for becoming a workplace for wellness are strong. Providing health information, implementing healthy policies and changing the work environment can have a major impact on productivity. Review what other workplaces have done and consider how their examples may relate to your workplace.

[See case studies](#)

### References

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