

How well is your Workplace?

Employees are the most valuable asset to any company so it makes good sense to look after your most valuable asset. The easiest way to do this is by implementing a Workplace Health and Happiness Program or a wellness program.

Workplace Health often refers to the efforts to assist employees (and sometimes their families) to make voluntary lifestyle changes, such as increasing their physical activity or making healthier food choices. A workplace wellness program can have many benefits for both employers and employees. The most important benefit is healthier, happier lives for employees. Workplace wellness programs can help employees to understand their current health status and how to reduce potential health risks.

A wellness program implemented into the workplace provides access, opportunity and the encouragement for employees and management to actively participate in improving their own health. Many of the larger corporations in Australia have implemented wellness programs over previous years. These programs range from Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) which provide confidential counselling, education on healthy eating and onsite gymnasiums that promote physical activity. In today's society, the promotion of health within the workplace can not be limited to just physical activity and healthy eating.

An employees "outside-of-work" life directly effects how productive they are while they are at work and directly contributes to their level of sick leave and family leave. Issues such as gambling, financial health, drug and alcohol abuse, relationships, sexual health, poor quality sleep and parenting skill all affect the total health and mental well-being of the employee.

Some key facts reported by Australian government departments and community organisations support the need to address issues that relate to employees health and happiness:

- 2 million Australians feel the social and financial impacts of problem gambling.
- Approximately 3.3 million Australians are obese with another 5.6 million overweight.
- It is estimated that there were 408,100 victims of domestic violence in Australia in 2002-03 of whom 87% were women.
- Reducing nocturnal sleep by as little as 1.3 to 1.5 hours for one night reduces daytime alertness by as much as 32 percent.
- Stress-related workers compensation claims have increased by 400% in the last 10 years.
- Depressed men are twice as likely as depressed women to abuse alcohol and drugs.

Current workplace legislation requires hazards to be identified and a suitable strategy to be implemented to reduce or eliminate the risk. With increasing evidence that absenteeism, productivity and morale are intricately linked to the physical and mental health of employees, workplace health promotion allows legal obligations to be met while benefiting the employer, employees and their families.

Developing the right wellness program and adapting it successfully to bring about the lifestyle changes necessary to improve health can seem challenging for an organisation. If your business is interested in implementing or participating in a Workplace Health and Happiness Program contact Amanda Evans on (02) 49426835 or amanda@bebh.com.au.