



SETTING UP A WELLNESS PROGRAM
A CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS



HEALTH
Advocate[™]

ABOUT THIS CHECKLIST

This publication provides a step-by-step guide to initiate a business strategy geared to your work force. Whether you choose to invest in a full-blown fitness center, online health programs, smoking cessation program, onsite biometric screenings or any other component or combination, the elements for successful participation remain the same. Following this checklist can help maximize employee utilization, reduce absences, injuries and claims, and result in greater productivity and lower healthcare costs.

Health Advocate, Inc. the nation's leading health advocacy and assistance company, provides a spectrum of time-and money-saving solutions to more than 10 million Americans and more than 3,000 employers and other plan sponsors. Our core advocacy program is centered around a team of Personal Health Advocates (PHAs), typically registered nurses supported by medical directors and administrative experts. PHAs help members navigate the healthcare system and resolve clinical, insurance and administrative issues. Our complementary solutions, offered at an additional charge, include Wellness Advocate, providing a menu of solutions that leverages our core Personal Health Advocates to help employees adopt healthier behaviors. Other complementary programs include: Benefits Integrator, Enrollment Advocate, FMLA Support and Independent Appeals Administration.

Founded in 2001, the company is headquartered in suburban Philadelphia with sales offices in major cities. Health Advocate has been recognized as one of America's fastest growing private companies by *Inc. 500*. *Philadelphia Magazine* has rated Health Advocate as one of the Top 20 Places to Work. Health Advocate does not replace health insurance coverage, provide medical care or recommend treatment.

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aising healthcare costs can be significantly reduced by getting employees to change unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, inactivity and excess stress. These lifestyle factors lead to absenteeism, increased claims, turnover and, most importantly, chronic—and costly—disease. But getting employees to change can be a challenge.

It is important to have a well thought-out plan with built-in elements that maximize participation and that also encourage long-lasting changes. The following steps are recommended as a foundation for developing a successful wellness program.

A good starting place for instituting a successful wellness program is to establish a “wellness” team to oversee the development and implementation. The team, composed of employees and managers from all sectors and at all levels, helps promote employee buy-in, lends wellness programs a human face, and creates an opportunity for team members to serve as wellness ambassadors.

Assemble a team

Set goals

- *Determine the goals of your program.* Examples include: reducing healthcare costs, increasing production, decreasing absenteeism, and using wellness as a recruiting and retention benefit.
- *Tailor your goals.* What works for one company may not work for yours. Success is based on customizing programs to your specific population's needs and interests.
- *Create manageable steps and achievable timelines.* A timeline that is either too short or too long can either stall participation or create undue stress.
- *Build in measurements.* Determine how and when outcomes—such as a number of employees who experienced weight loss—will be measured.

Assess needs

Asking employees about programs of interest is crucial for success.

- *Survey employee interests.* Asking employees about the types of programs they are interested in is crucial for success. Even if only 20 percent of your population is overweight, 80 percent of employees may be very interested in having a personal coach who can help them reach new fitness levels or to eat healthier.
- *Health Risk Assessments (HRAs).* These assessments, which can be in print or electronic formats, provide employees with an in-depth summary of their risk for disease as well as their unhealthy habits. The HRA aggregate data can help your organization determine the most advantageous programs for your workforce.
- *Biometric screenings.* Employees may be unaware that they have a health condition such as high blood pressure or that their weight has reached an unhealthy level. Screenings that measure blood pressure, body fat and other early disease indicators provide additional information about the health complexion of your workforce.

Create a wellness culture

- *Enlist senior management support.* This support needs to be more than verbal. It is valuable for employees to see their leadership team out walking, attending health seminars or being spotlighted for their successes. Encourage walking meetings with participation from all management.

- *Make the workplace healthy.* You may choose to ban smoking in the building; fill your vending machines with bottled water, apples and other healthy snacks; service healthy, low-fat, nutrient-dense food in the cafeteria; and other changes.
- *Encourage participation through social motivation.* For instance, managers could encourage formation of a team to walk in the community Walk-to-Cure Diabetes.
- *Make wellness programs convenient.* Offer onsite seminars or weight management meetings. Online tools can be extremely helpful and allows employees access to information or personal wellness coaching, for instance, at their convenience. If possible, provide a walking area inside or outside. Make your stairways inviting and safe so people will chose to use them instead of the elevator.
- *Provide a variety of wellness options.* Examples may include memberships to a fitness center; onsite stress management classes; massage sessions; smoking cessation programs; and lunchtime health seminars. The more choices, the more participation.
- *Emphasize the importance of family fitness.* Provide ways employees can include their family members in some activities. One example: Offer a company-wide fitness day, where families can participate in baseball games, foot or bicycle races, etc.

Communicate effectively

Maximizing participation rests on a communications campaign that is far-reaching, ongoing and targeted to your specific workforce. Employee newsletters, meetings, posters and other internal communications should include these elements:

- *Education.* Seminars, employee newsletters and posters help to emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- *Sharing.* A forum for sharing success stories can be a powerful motivator. Highlight employees who are in different programs to talk about the benefits they have gained from the program.
- *Make it easy to participate.* Communicate how simple it is to get started. For example, have sign-up sheets for walk-a-thons in the cafeteria.

- *Provide ongoing communications.* Find new, interesting and regular ways to remind employees about the benefits of exercise, weight management, smoking cessation, etc.
- *Emphasize the value of the program.* For instance, communicate that healthier lifestyles result in fewer medical costs and improve the quality of life.
- *Extend communications to the entire family.* Include family members in announcements and in ongoing communications.
- *Communicate that participation is expected.* Reiterate the need to improve health to prevent sickness and serious disease.

Provide incentives

- *Reward employees.* Rewards offered at regular intervals throughout the program encourages participation more readily than if only offered at the end of participation.
- *Tie rewards to the activity.* For instance, a fitness program designed for employees who have never exercised may include an incentive that reduces their healthcare premiums during the duration of the program. This can help them associate their participation with healthcare savings.

Celebrate group success

- *Spotlight group efforts.* For instance, if you offer a weight management program, highlight the fact that the group lost 1,000 pounds during the last quarter. Or, if there is a walking group, have them track their miles and celebrate when the team has walked 5,000 miles.
- *Tally and announce company-wide totals.* This number should reflect the number of people participating in the different programs and be updated and announced at regular intervals.
- *Provide group celebration activities.* For example, host an “achievement party” to recognize participation in a health program and to recognize results.



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