

Comprehensive Workplace Wellness, What is it?



White Paper:

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Comprehensive Workplace Wellness (CWW) is the gold standard in workplace wellness. It is an important way that organizations can invest in their human capital as it addresses both organizational and employee health and is built on the premise that healthy employees create a healthy bottom line.

Comprehensive Workplace Wellness is a necessary investment for business. It results in a positive return on investment (ROI) and organizations reap the benefits of a more productive, engaged and motivated workforce. It is a strategy that enables organizations to compete on a global level as it is linked with the attraction and retention of key personnel. CWW stops or even reverses the trend of rising costs related to health claims, increased absenteeism and decreased productivity. Its focus is on prevention as it addresses health-related issues in the areas of personal lifestyle practices and coping skills, working conditions and the physical and social environment. Comprehensive Workplace Wellness is a component of an organization's strategic business plan and is driven by commitment from top executives and employee identified health needs. It has evolved significantly over the past decade and its benefits are measurable and quantifiable. The savings of direct and indirect costs substantiated by workplace wellness research means that organizations can no longer afford not to invest in their human capital – their most valuable resource. It is after all the people in an organization who produce the profits, create new products, innovate with new ideas, and promote the organization.

Much like organizations that were reluctant to embrace technology, businesses that resist the workplace wellness movement are at risk of becoming passé. The cost of doing nothing is becoming unsustainable, while the case for Comprehensive Workplace Wellness is undisputed.

What is Comprehensive Workplace Wellness?

Comprehensive Workplace Wellness (CWW) is a movement away from traditional wellness programs (see Table1 for comparison). Workplace wellness is no longer solely about education and promotion in the form of lunch and learns or other ‘add-on’ and ‘ad hoc’ offerings. It is strategic and provides a means by which businesses can address many organizational challenges such as an aging workforce, attraction and retention, global competitiveness, and rising health care costs.

Workplace wellness has evolved over the last 10 -15 years and addresses a range of health issues: personal health practices and coping skills, working conditions, the workplace culture, and the social and physical environment – all of which contribute to healthy and productive employees within a healthy and supportive environment.

Essential to CWW is the incorporation of wellness into the organization’s strategic plan, thus signifying a shift away from workplace wellness as a nice thing to do to a *must* thing to do. The evolved workplace wellness programs are measurable and sustainable and have a set of key characteristics that differentiates them from traditional wellness programs. Comprehensive Workplace Wellness is:

- CEO driven
- Part of the strategic planning process
- Clearly communicated through the organization
- Directed by employee identified needs
- Integrated within all levels of the organization
- Sustainable
- Measurable (programs are evaluated based on health and economic indicators)
- Essential to a healthy bottom line

- An investment, not a cost
- A serious business strategy

Thus, CWW involves recognizing the link between health and productivity. This link has been established through research and it is quantifiable. For instance, research demonstrates that employees with a high health risk status cost more in terms of absenteeism and lost productivity.¹ It is time that employers act on the fact that the health of employees and the health of their organizations are inevitably intertwined. When this happens and the CEO and top executives are engaged, an environment conducive to wellness is created, which in turn increases productivity and decreases the cost of doing business.

In short, employers pay more for unhealthy employees. And implementing CWW is an investment in human capital – an organization’s most valuable resource. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated benefits such as lower health care and insurance costs, lower absenteeism and improved performance and productivity with cost savings of as much as \$3 to \$5 or more per employee commonly reported. Not only do CWW programs pay for themselves, they also result in a positive ROI – as much as \$15 for each dollar invested - even within the first 12-18 months after implementation.² The challenge is for executives to implement a program that is comprehensive and meaningful to their employees, and is sustainable and measureable. Traditionally, wellness programs lack specific targets and evaluation. Without measurement and evaluation, how can one determine if program goals and ROI are achieved?

When CWW becomes part of an organization’s strategic plan and business strategy, success is assured. And success must be measured in both health and economic outcomes. Enlightened organizations create a culture of wellness

¹ Edington, D. (2009). *Zero Trends: Health as a Serious Economic Strategy*. Health Management Research Center, University of Michigan.

²American Heart Association. “Position Statement on Effective Worksite Wellness Programs”
http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@hcm/documents/downloadable/ucm_308067.pdf



because they know that the cost of doing nothing is unsustainable and the benefits of action are significant. The time to act is now.

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Table 1
Comprehensive Workplace Wellness (CWW) vs. Traditional Workplace Wellness Programs

Traditional Workplace Wellness Programs	Comprehensive Workplace Wellness
Mandated to middle-management of occupational health and human resource departments.	Driven by senior management, built into the corporation's strategic plan and driven by a corporation-wide Healthy Workplace Committee.
Programs are typically delivered by occupational health and human resources within the organization.	Programs are designed and delivered with the support of external groups in partnership with the organization's human resources. Privacy and confidentiality are guaranteed.
Programs are directed by needs identified by employees and are typically lunch and learns, information sessions and health fairs	Programs are directed by needs identified by employers and employees based on valid assessment tools and are comprehensive and sustainable.
Needs identified by (individual or group) employee feedback to human resources.	Needs identified by organization-wide ongoing baseline health risk assessments and surveys.
Programs are more likely to reach the already "converted". They tend not to reach those that have a need or are not interested. Strategies to enhance participation are limited to non-existent.	Programs are incorporated into all aspects of the workplace, and development of effective communication plans and strategies to enhance participation are critical. Therefore programs are more likely to reach the entire employee base.
Programs typically target individual health practices only.	Programs target all three component of CWW – personal health & lifestyle, workplace culture/organizational health, and physical work environment & musculoskeletal health.
Programs typically have a start and finish.	Commitment to CWW is built into creating a workplace culture of health and is therefore indefinite. Sustainability is essential.
Traditional workplace wellness programs often don't have The Senior management commitment behind them to truly Affect changed needed.	CWW has an ongoing commitment from senior management which is critical to success and sustainability. In fact, they are CEO driven.
Traditional workplace wellness programs typically have no effective evaluation component.	CWW programs have a strong evaluation component based on both health and economic indicators (e.g. project logic model) that serves both a planning and evaluation tool.
Traditional workplace wellness initiatives typically do not have stated health/productivity goals stated health/ productivity goals.	CWW initiatives have clearly stated and widely communicated health / productivity / economic goals.

Adapted from http://www.diabetes.ca/files/hwi_vs_traditional_workplace.pdf