



**EMPLOYEE WELLNESS BEST PRACTICE
RESOURCES**

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EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAM BEST PRACTICE RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An employee wellness program is a program implemented by an employer to encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce the risk of health-related concerns for their employees. This toolkit provides resources and information related to developing, and sustaining, a valuable wellness program.

Employee wellness programs have proven to:

- ✓ Improve the health of employees
- ✓ Decrease absenteeism
- ✓ Increase productivity
- ✓ Decrease healthcare costs



While it is clear that poor diet and exercise lead to acute and chronic disease states, job-related stress and employee burnout are also associated with various physical health problems such as insomnia, depression, and heart disease. This stress may be caused by a lack of appropriate resources and coping mechanisms provided by an employer. Unfortunately, one strategy of stress-relief people turn to is drug and alcohol abuse. Due to healthcare workers' access to controlled substances in the workplace, drug diversion may result. Therefore, it is equally important to include physical and mental health programs to employees.

WELLNESS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Wellness program development involves creating policies, programs, and resources that promote health and wellness among staff. In order to create an effective program there are four principal steps to follow:

1. **ASSESSMENT** of the current program and work environment
2. **PLANNING** the goals, ideas, and strategies for programs
3. **IMPLEMENTATION** of the plan
4. **EVALUATION** of the programs

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) provides a comprehensive Workplace Health Resource Center with information for each of the four steps, program ideas, and intervention strategies to guide the development of a wellness program. This toolkit references this resource center and includes additional manuals, best practice resources, and examples of programs or policies that have successfully been implemented.

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAM BEST PRACTICE RESOURCES

Wellness is not the absence of disease or stress, but is defined as “presence of purpose in life, active involvement in satisfying work and play, joyful relationships, a healthy body and living environment, and happiness”.¹

INTRODUCTION

Healthy employees are happier, which benefits employers in the long run. Therefore, employers have an incentive to provide services to improve employee quality of life. One way to do this is to embed an employee wellness program within the organization. An employee wellness program involves developing policies, programs, and resources that promote health and wellness among staff. Employee wellness programs encourage healthy lifestyles and habits that reduce the risk of health issues while providing easy access to resources needed to meet health goals. A well-rounded program includes diet and exercise programs, mental health or other personal support, and preventative health services.

Why is an employee wellness program beneficial?

According to the CDC, poor employee health leads to a decline in productivity by 5-10% and an increase in absenteeism at work.² Productivity losses linked to absenteeism alone cost employers \$1,685 per employee each year.³ Healthcare costs are affected as well. Insurance premiums, hospitalizations, and workers' compensation claims are just a few costs to employers that are increased due to employees with acute or chronic health conditions.² Many chronic health conditions, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes are caused, in part, to modifiable lifestyle-related behaviors. Employers have the opportunity to create a work environment that promotes physical and mental health to prevent or resolve these issues. By implementing an employee wellness program, health risks may be reduced, benefiting employers by decreasing healthcare costs and increasing productivity. One study found that for every dollar invested into a cardiac rehabilitation and exercise training program they returned \$6 in health care savings by reducing the employees' risk of health conditions.⁴ Worksite health programs can result in up to 27% reduction in absenteeism, 26% reduction in health care costs, and 32% reduction in worker's compensation and disability claims costs.⁵ Therefore, it is cost effective to invest in employee health.

Online calculators are available to determine costs and benefits of obesity or tobacco cessation programs and relation to absenteeism or return on investment.

1. [CDC's Obesity Cost Calculator](#)
2. [ROI Calculator](#)

Additional resources for cost benefits of an employee wellness program:

1. [Wisconsin Worksite Wellness 2010](#) Pages 3-5 provide statistics for return on investment, identifies costs per specific chronic disease states
2. [WorkWellINC](#) Pages 2-5 estimate employee health cost distribution based on risk of employees



Why is mental health included?

It is easy to imagine how diet, exercise, and preventative services can benefit employees and decrease healthcare costs. However, poor mental health may lead to changes in behavioral and physical health as well. Stress is one factor that is highly affected by one's work environment. Work-related stress is defined by the World Health Organization as the response people have when work pressure challenges their ability to cope.⁶ Factors such as low social support, inflexible work hours, and poor communication can lead to burnout and even depression.⁷



Healthcare workers, in particular, are subject to compassion fatigue which is a combination of burnout and secondary traumatic stress.¹ Many hospital employees are exposed to distressing patient situations on a daily basis. Over time this may lead to a gradual lessening of compassion and an indifference to patients. Another result may be that caregivers focus on others instead of themselves which could create excess stress and, potentially, destructive behaviors, such as substance abuse.⁸

Unfortunately, this could escalate and negatively impact not only that employee's personal life, but coworkers, and most importantly, patient care. Therefore, it is vital to create an atmosphere that promotes work-life balance and provides resources for those affected by a stressful life event or mental disorder.

The first step towards identifying employee needs and providing services to boost morale and mental health is to understand the causes and signs of compassion fatigue and burnout. This information is covered in the following resources:

1. [SAMHSA Understanding Compassion Fatigue](#)

- [Dealing with Stress in the Workplace Toolkit](#) This portal offers information, resources, and tools on topics of employee frustration, the impact of stress, and compassion fatigue/burnout. Though specifically targeted to behavioral health employees, it may be applied to any organization
- [Understanding Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Satisfaction: Tips for Disaster Responders](#) – A 25-minute YouTube video with objectives to recognize positive aspects of helping others and create strategies to reduce negative aspects

2. [Compassion Fatigue.org](#)

A website with a mission to promote awareness and understanding of compassion fatigue for caregivers. This highlights symptoms to recognize and lists of national and international organizations providing resources, training, and counseling to general-, family-, and trauma-related caregivers

3. [Burnout Syndrome Among Healthcare Professionals](#)

American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy article identifying burnout among peers, work practices that can contribute to it, and strategies to prevent it

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS AND WELLNESS

A link has also been found between community service and individual wellness which has led to employee volunteer programs (EVPs) becoming more popular. The goals of a worksite wellness program overlap those of an EVP, including to improve the mental health of participants.⁹ Out of a survey of 23,000 people who



volunteer, nine out of ten reported “getting an emotional boost” after helping others.⁹ The UnitedHealth Group’s 2013 Health and Volunteering Study found that those who volunteer reported improved physical and emotional health including reduced obesity, increased levels of activity, and higher levels of overall satisfaction with life.¹⁰ People with the highest levels of life satisfaction are highly motivated by the positive impact they have had on others. Seventy eight percent (78%) of volunteers reported lower stress and 94% endorsed an improved mood. Volunteers also scored better than non-volunteers in measures of emotional well-being, including personal independence, self-esteem, and capacity for interpersonal relationships.¹⁰ These relationships and social networks may help to buffer stress, especially in the workplace where a lack of social support is cited as one cause of employee burnout.



Not only does the individual benefit from EVPs, but they can lead to an improved business image and employee engagement. Employees who volunteer through their workplace report more positive attitudes toward their employer. Eighty nine percent (89%) of companies find a positive correlation between participation and higher engagement scores. A majority of companies agree that community involvement contributes to key business goals, including improved reputation, attraction and retention of employees.¹¹ EVPs encourage employee engagement, instill positive values, build employee morale,

promote leadership and skill development, strengthen relationships, and improve employee health.⁹ Therefore, employee volunteer programs are becoming more popular as employers continue discovering ways to improve employee wellness.

How do employee wellness programs prevent drug abuse and drug diversion?

Healthcare workers have a lower threshold for stress due to the nature of their careers. People affected by mental health disorders, including work-related stress, are more likely to be affected by a substance abuse disorder.⁶ Unfortunately, when there is a shortage of time or positive coping skills such as regular exercise or healthy relaxation, one coping mechanism is alcohol or drug abuse.^{12,13} Due to easy access to controlled substances, healthcare workers are at a high risk for drug abuse, which may lead to drug diversion. By creating a workplace which strives to combat work-related risk factors, relieve stress, and provide support and awareness for mental health, employees will have access to other venues to cope besides substance abuse. One way to encompass all these aspects is to create an employee wellness program.

This toolkit contains information and best practice resources to build a wellness program within a hospital organization. This includes a focus on resources to promote mental health, in order to prevent drug abuse and diversion. Support for employees is a key component within the program. State resources for assistance programs are listed in this section.

WELLNESS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Where to Start

An effective wellness program requires development of practices, policies, and programs that promote a culture of health for employees, and in turn, their patients. This will require support from fellow management and staff. Developing a wellness committee, or team, will help produce a quality program. This team should help create a coordinated approach to planning and implementing the programs in a successful manner. In order to create an effective program, there are four steps to follow:

Four steps to creating or revitalizing your employee wellness program

1. **ASSESSMENT** of the current worksite environment
2. **PLANNING** the framework for implementation of the program
3. **IMPLEMENTATION** of the plan
4. **EVALUATION** of the program

A comprehensive checklist for the four steps can be found here: [Workplace Health Development Checklist](#). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) [Total Worker Health](#) campaign provides resources for each of these steps as well.

Step 1: Assessment

The first step to developing an employee wellness program is to assess the current programs that are in place within the organization. A workplace health assessment gathers information about factors that affect employee health in the workplace. By discovering risk factors for poor health and identifying employee needs, the assessment may lead to ideas for improvement.

Assessment of the current status of the worksite's employee wellness and its programs will help:

- Define strengths and areas of improvement at baseline, which will drive the focus of efforts
- Identify employee needs
- Establish organizational goals
- Compare effects of implementations at the post-implementation evaluation stage

Factors that affect employee wellness such as lifestyle choices, work environment, and support systems should be assessed. This will help determine which workplace health strategies should be prioritized as most valuable to the company. From there, plans to allocate resources and implement programs may begin.

Who

A diverse team of trusted leaders should complete this assessment. This team would ideally represent a wide range of employee levels from various departments to gain different points of view within the organization.

For ideas about how to develop a team, visit: [Creating a Workplace Wellness Committee](#)

Step 1: Assessment (Continued)

What

The amount of information to assess may depend on organizational goals of implementation and current developmental stage of the current program. Some information that may be beneficial to assess includes:

- Current health promotion policies and programs
- Employee participation and interest
- Health claims data
- Accident/safety reports
- Absenteeism
- Employee retention data

The CDC identified specific conditions to target for workplace health strategies. Assess what your hospital is doing to combat these disease states:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol and substance abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Cholesterol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blood pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Breast, colorectal, and cervical cancer | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Obesity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tobacco use | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> And more... |

How

- Report cards
 - o [CDC Worksite Health Scorecard](#) – A tool to obtain a well-rounded view of the organization and collect information regarding current health interventions
- Review current policies and programs
 - o Explore health benefits packages, transportation, and other health resources, as well as preventative services currently available to employees
- Site visits
 - o Gather observational information about the workplace and discuss topics of interest with employees
- Request data from outside sources
 - o i.e. healthcare claims
- Employee surveys
 - o Measure satisfaction and interest of the target audience to garner participation.
 - o [CDC's Employee Level Assessment](#) has information regarding how to design a survey
 - o [Wisconsin's Employee Input](#) includes example questions for a wellness survey as well as other resources

After assessment and analysis of the current status is completed, the planning stage may begin.

Further resources for assessment strategies:

1. [CDC Workplace Health Assessment](#) Provides more information about strategies to assess the workplace and how to utilize the scorecard
2. [SafeWell Practice Guidelines: An Integrated Approach to Worker Health](#) Provides detailed descriptions of many types of assessments as well as resources for other toolkits

Step 2: Plan

The next step is to determine what programs or policies to include in the workplace health program and how to implement them. This will involve creating organizational leadership ladders to ensure goals are achieved appropriately. Planning has an integral impact on success. One study conducted by the [Society of Human Resource Management Group](#) found that strategic planning has a direct relationship to positive outcomes, particularly in engagement, improved health, and medical plan savings.

Vision/Mission Statement

In order to appropriately organize the information discovered in the assessment and ensure there is one united goal, it is recommended to first develop a vision/mission statement. One starting point is to write down objectives to achieve. This will help shape the purpose of the program which will be used to guide decisions throughout the implementation process to meet that vision. Sample mission statements and toolkits to create mission and vision statements may be found in this [OSHA](#) toolkit on pages 13 – 28.

Goals and Strategies

Next, program goals and strategies to obtain them should be developed for the key issues identified in the assessment.

Some thoughts to consider when strategizing are:

1. How to prioritize activities and officiate plan management
 - This will be based on the mission statement and employee needs at baseline
2. Resources and budget
 - This will determine if the hospital will be implementing programs itself, or if the committee should recommend or join with local resources to provide for employees. For example, smaller hospitals may work with a local gym rather than building their own (see page 12 for more considerations for small or community hospitals)
3. Communication of ideas to stakeholders
 - Determine the best way to reach employees to market each program

More information about programing strategies can be found on:

1. [CDC Planning Strategies](#). Includes more general information about how to develop a plan to implement change
2. [WorkWellINC](#) Pages 8-9 include more general information about how to develop a plan to implement change
3. [SafeWell Practice Guidelines: An Integrated Approach to Worker Health](#) Pages 83-89 include factors to consider when developing a plan and sample program plans

Step 3: Implementation

Implementation includes all the steps needed to put the program into place and make it available for employees. Communication, leadership, and appropriate resource utilization will still be vital, as discussed in the previous section. Multifactorial interventions have the biggest impact for the organization. If multiple health issues are addressed at once, resources are saved and influence is increased for the user. Interventions may include programs, policies, benefits, or employee support. These may affect the organization in different ways, such as on an individual employee, interpersonal, organizational, or environmental level.



To employ all of these components, one recommendation from the Wisconsin Worksite Wellness booklet is to utilize the “Three-pronged Approach”. This considers individual behaviors, environmental changes, and policy development to make a stronger impact on a specific aspect of behavior in the workplace. For example: encouraging a healthy diet through individual incentives for employees, offering better food options onsite, and developing policies for food vendors would meet criteria at each prong. For more information and examples for this principle and other implementation strategies visit:

1. [Wisconsin Worksite Wellness](#) Pages 29-53 describe the “Three-pronged Approach” and provide ideas for multiple health initiatives such as nutrition, mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, and tobacco cessation. This booklet quantifies the amount of resources required to implement the ideas. This is a great resource for smaller hospitals
2. [CDC Workplace Health Implementation](#) Includes information about implementation strategies
3. [WorkWellNC Workbooks](#) Includes “Move More,” “Manage Stress,” “Wellness Committee,” and “Eat Smart” workbooks which provide examples of policies and program to implement in a large organization as well as informational posters and national resources on the topic. Additional topic resources based on CDC Worksite Health Scorecard Assessment previously discussed are also included
4. [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\) Integration Practices](#) Lists recommended steps to begin implementing programs
5. [WorkWellNC Toolkit](#) Breaks down progressive program suggestions based on if the organization is just beginning, in process, or advanced in their wellness program development
6. [World Health Organization Workplace Health Policies](#) Lists examples of best practice policies
7. [Work Healthy Georgia](#) Pages 13-33 include tips on how to write a policy for multiple health initiatives and provide support for the program. Pages 52-57 include additional resources for sample policies and risk assessments
8. [WorkHealthy Hospitals - A Primer to Leading Change](#): Provides specific examples of programs that have been successfully employed by hospitals

Step 3: Implementation (Continued)

Mental Health Resources

One way to relieve employee stress is to employ a program designed to assist employees through personal problems. Employee assistance programs are services that provide legal, financial, and mental health counseling, including alcohol and drug abuse for large employers. The following are programs available in North Carolina:

1. [NC State Human Resources EAP](#)
2. [Employee Assistance Network, Inc](#)
3. [LifeServices EAP](#)

Other resources regarding mental health or work-related stress policies and programs include:

1. [World Health Organization Mental Health Policies](#)
Highlights mental health in the workplace, and provides in-depth guidance for policy development and implementation
2. [WorkWellNC Stress Management](#) Includes a toolkit to guide the process of setting up stress management programs, including a workbook discussing policies, workspaces, and other stress relieving activities
3. [Schwartz Rounds](#) An evidence-based program that serves to foster a supportive environment for hospital staff of all disciplines. Monthly meetings are planned to discuss the emotional and social challenges of caring for patients. Rounds have been implemented in over 430 healthcare organizations internationally. To conduct Rounds, the institution must be a member. To inquire, fill out the form below:
- [Schwartz Center Membership Inquiry Form](#)
4. [Tea for the Soul](#) A service typically provided by hospital chaplains that encourages staff relaxation and provides a time when they can break away from the fast-paced work environment. Examples include tea and coffee, snacks, massages, coloring activities, and a supportive listening environment
5. [International Federation of Chaplains](#) Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Chaplains are trained to debrief health care workers and provide support in individual or group settings after stressful or traumatic patient cases
6. [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) An agency within the Department of Health and Human Services that is leading public health efforts. Their website has information on a broad range of topics related to abuse and wellness, as well as programs to help combat it
7. [Healthy People 2020](#): Overviews substance abuse and includes interventions and evidenced-based resources available to help meet objectives such as decreasing substance abuse and increasing the proportion of people who are referred to substance abuse treatment



Step 4: Evaluation

Once programs have been planned, evaluating the wellness programs will allow you to determine if they are meeting proposed goals and employee needs. Evaluation will help determine the value of the programs, both in a business sense and quality to employees. There are multiple ways in which to evaluate a program, such as process and outcome measures. Process measures determine if interventions meet the standards defined by the initial mission statement. They can also be used to quantify the costs associated with the program and number of employees reached. Outcome measures take into account short-term goals and how they relate to long-term outcomes. This will help drive continued change to meet the long-term goals. Documentation of the implementation process and the effects of changes created is key to sustaining the program.

Examples of process measures

- Staff participation and satisfaction
- Policy changes
- Educational materials and programs developed

Examples of outcome measures

- Pre/post surveys
- Cafeteria menu options
- Health indicator improvements
- Return on investment

The [CDC's Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health](#) recommends a systematic approach through six steps and four standards to evaluate a wellness program successfully. Details regarding this concept are available through the above link.



Other resources for evaluation methods include:

1. [Wisconsin Worksite Wellness](#) Pages 61-65 include sample evaluations, a wellness program scorecard, and specific topics to include in your assessment
2. [Metrics beyond ROI can capture wellness outcomes](#) An article by the Society for Human Resource Management outlining seven metrics that can be used to evaluate a wellness program: financial outcomes, health impact, participation, satisfaction, organizational support, productivity and performance, and value on investment

Considerations for Smaller Hospitals

Most hospitals in North Carolina are small hospitals with less than 200 beds, requiring less employees. The culture of small hospitals is unique in that the employees are the community members. Implementing a wellness program may seem like a large and daunting task for a smaller system with a smaller budget and resources, however, by utilizing resources already available through the community and focusing on small steps a wellness program may be successful. Here are some considerations for the four workplace wellness development steps for small hospitals:



1. **Assessment:** Conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to identify community health areas to improve upon and focus on one area to start. Starting with a small step that fits the needs of the larger community can be more impactful and a more realistic goal. Easy and resourceful ways to gather information at the workplace are through emailed surveys using free survey websites or suggestion boxes.
2. **Plan:** Resources may be limited, so utilizing or advertising events already implemented is a great way to involve employees in the community and improve health. For example, advertise the local Parks and Recreation leagues (i.e., bowling, volleyball, softball, or fitness classes), develop a relationship with a local gym or Weight Watchers class to provide discounts for employees that join. Other opportunities may be through culture changes within the hospital that are easy and free to set up such as walking programs aimed at providing a mental break for employees, increasing movement, and creating a network for co-workers to connect and develop relationships. Policy changes can affect the wellness culture as well such as non-smoking policies and contracts with food vendors. Another consideration is that patients in community hospitals have relationships with employees that extend beyond the professional level. Stressful events such as Code Blues or traumas may have a more personal impact on employees than in larger hospitals. Therefore, decompressing after these events will be imperative to protecting mental health. Ensure services such as debrief huddles, chaplains, or mental break time is available for employees.
3. **Implementation:** Slowly implementing the plan may be the best option for success in hospitals with less resources and less employees. Make healthy choices or signing up for a program simple and accessible for employees to do. Motivation is also a key factor to gain involvement to ensure success. Celebrate with employees as they reach health goals and encourage other to do the same.
4. **Evaluation:** Before evaluating the program, it is important to determine the hospital's definition of success. This involves going back to the original purpose for the wellness program outlined in the mission statement or vision the committee had prior to planning the program. Then determine the metrics that fit the vision. For example, employee satisfaction and involvement are easy to track through attendance and free surveys.

Overall, though it may seem like a sizeable task, wellness programs have proven successful and impactful for hospitals large and small. It may take creativity, networking, leadership, and community involvement to build a program that will expand resources and positively affect employee health.

BEST PRACTICE RESOURCE LIST

For more information, the following links include manuals, toolkits, and resources that recommend best practices for creating a team, writing policies, creating programs, implementing benefits, and garnering employee participation.

General Resources and Guidelines

1. [CDC Workplace Health Promotion](#)
 - [Workplace Health Model](#): Recommendations for assessment, planning and management, implementation, and evaluation of a wellness program
 - [Workplace Health Strategies](#): Resources organized by health condition for workplace health strategies
2. [American Hospital Association's A Call to Action: Creating a Culture of Health](#). A report to encourage leaders to create a culture of health including financial rationale and samples of best practices at select hospitals
 - [Health and Wellness Programs for Hospital Employees](#) includes results from an American Hospital Association Survey to identify best practices in employee health and wellness programs. This report includes content of programs, participation initiatives, and barriers to expansion
3. [SafeWell Practice Guidelines](#)
Provides a detailed model to coordinate efforts in developing a health program in the workplace as well as implementation strategies
4. [Hero Employee Wellness Scorecard](#)
A report generated from a survey regarding best practices and planning and implementation strategies of employee wellness. The outcome found that organizations with well-developed employee wellness programs have better health and financial outcomes. It uses data and best practice experiences to make associations between the two

Toolkits

1. [CDC - Federal and State Organizations](#): A list of links to federal and state agency websites and toolkits for implementing a wellness program
2. [WorkWellNC](#)
A step-by-step toolkit encouraging self-assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of a comprehensive worksite wellness program with workbooks to serve as guides. Includes free resources organized by areas listed in the CDC Worksite Health Scorecard
3. [Well County NC](#)
Step-by-step guide on creating and maintaining a wellness program, as well as success stories from hospitals across the state
4. [Wisconsin Worksite Wellness 2010](#):
A manual developed to aid in self-assessment and development of an action plan to implement, or improve upon a wellness program

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