



WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE



Investing in health is good business.

Employers get it. Healthy, happy employees are productive employees. Recent data show that 77% of large manufacturing companies have implemented employee wellness programs, and almost 30% of small businesses do – an increase of 50% compared to just five years ago. Why the rapid increase? **Nearly 60% of all after-tax profit is spent on corporate health benefits, and 80% of these costs are spent on only 10% of the sickest employees.** Preventive strategies that support health and wellness, such as those found in integrative lifestyle change programs, are successfully decreasing health care costs in corporations nationwide.

- A 2005 review of more than 120 studies of comprehensive health management programs offered by employers as a way to curtail health care costs showed that employers experienced an average 26% reduction in health care costs and an average \$5.81 returned for every \$1 invested in worksite health promotion initiatives.
- Lifestyle change programs targeting high prevalence, high-cost conditions such as heart disease have been successfully incorporated as workplace interventions. One program using naturopathic doctors to deliver education on diet, exercise, stress reduction and dietary supplements resulted in an annual employer savings of more than \$1,100 per participant. A similar program teaching health habits, activity, stress management and smoking cessation with select use of integrative-trained MDs found a 48% reduction in annual employer costs per participant.
- A program in Resilience Training at Allina Hospitals and Clinics included mind-body techniques, exercise, and nutrition. More than 60% of the hospital employees achieved remission of their depression without the aid of medications, at a significant cost savings. In addition to lowered stress and anxiety levels, a research director at Allina reported that improved productivity and activity (presenteeism) had a value of \$2,181 per employee per year.
- A comprehensive risk-reduction program targeting 10 modifiable health risks for 2,458 workers at 121 Colorado businesses found reductions in almost all factors, including obesity (-2.0%), poor eating habits (-5.8%), poor physical activity (-6.5%), tobacco use (-1.3%), high alcohol consumption (-1.7%), high stress (-3.5%), depression (-2.3%), high blood pressure (-0.3%), high total cholesterol (-0.9%), and high blood glucose (-0.2%). The return on investment (ROI) model estimated medical and productivity savings of \$2.03 for every \$1.00 invested at one year, with stronger projected savings as the course of chronic disease is avoided.
- The implementation of Whole-Person Caring programs emphasizing self-care, self-healing practices and lifestyle changes among hospital employees significantly decreased turnover, reducing costs by \$1.5 million per year. In addition, *patient* satisfaction significantly improved (even through the program didn't treat patients directly).

Employers sometimes question whether the ROI on prevention and wellness continues over time. Data from an eight year analysis show positive ROI for each program year with ratios ranging from a low of 1.16:1 to a high of 2.83:1. The average ROI across all eight years was 2.02:1. The total ROI approximated more than \$6 million.



The workplace is a microcosm of society. Creating a culture of health and a healthy environment supports a healthy lifestyle. The most effective workplace wellness programs show a return on investment greater than \$6:1. Exemplary programs are intentional about creating a strong culture of health, and often include modifications to the cafeteria and vending machine options, promotion of walking meetings, smoking bans, and enhancements to the physical environment to promote exercise, relaxation and stress reduction. Other critical factors include staff training to ensure that peers and managers are supportive and encourage healthy habits, allow time off for preventive clinical screenings, and offer incentives for healthy behavior activities (for example, discounts on insurance premiums).