



hrworkshop

Workplace health and wellbeing success

Q Our business is behind the eight ball when it comes to workplace health and wellbeing. How can we go about getting senior management to financially support a workplace health and wellbeing program, and getting the traction with line managers to make it a success?

A Employment-based health and wellbeing programs are still relatively new in Australia, so it is not surprising to come across HR professionals who are having difficulty convincing management to implement workplace health and wellbeing programs.

Fortunately, the argument supporting employee health and wellbeing programs is strong and well documented. Medibank Private's own research has shown that low levels of health and wellbeing among employees impacts directly on business productivity through lower employee efficiency and higher rates of absenteeism, presenteeism (the loss of productivity that occurs when employees come to work but aren't fully functioning because of an illness or injury) and stress.

In fact presenteeism alone costs businesses dearly, with an average of six working days of productivity lost each year per employee, costing approximately 3 per cent of the gross wage sum for the average employer. Presenting senior management with facts and figures such as these can really help build a case to implement a health and wellbeing program.

If businesses can improve employee health and wellbeing by adopting a health and wellbeing program, employers can reverse this productivity loss. There are also

additional payoffs, including increased employee engagement and satisfaction, and lower rates of staff turnover. Ultimately an investment in employee health and wellbeing is an investment in a business's bottom line.

To make an employee health and wellbeing program a success and realise the full benefits of such a program it is vitally important that all staff, including senior management and line managers, are engaged in the program.

The best way to achieve this is to make sure that a health and wellbeing program is relevant to a business's needs and the tasks undertaken by its employees.

When we designed a program for Medibank Private we began with an employee engagement survey and the offer of health risk assessments to identify problem areas, not only in employee health and behaviours, but also in legacy programs. This gave us a clear list of priorities. We then set out to build an evidence-based program that addresses the specific needs of our business, consulting staff along the way.

The importance of tailoring a program to organisational requirements and employee health needs cannot be understated. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all health and wellbeing program. Clearly the requirements of a health and wellbeing program for



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blue-collar industries such as mining or transport are quite different to that of corporate workplaces.

The second key step is to ensure that the program is fully integrated into the business. This includes providing easy access through the internet, linking with existing business processes such as annual awards, and embedding the program into the culture of the organisation.

The final element to ensure that staff are engaged in the health and wellbeing program is ongoing monitoring. It is important to always know what your current situation is and how you are tracking so that individual components can be modified to suit needs. This is a continual process which refines and adapts the health and wellbeing solution to the changing business and employee needs.

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