



Health programs boost productivity

THE team at Pro-Fit Corporate Health is delighted to have been named as a finalist in the 2007 Telstra Business Awards.

Pro-Fit Corporate Health is a provider of corporate health and fitness services to both the private and public sectors.

They offer at-work health assessments, flu vaccinations, fitness checks, keynote seminars and fitness classes, making Pro-Fit Corporate Health a one-stop-shop for preventative health among the corporate world.

Pro-Fit Corporate Health founder and managing director Chris Males said he wasn't alarmed at the growing trend towards at-work health options.

"Employers are now providing these benefits to staff because they

are not only recognising that prevention is cheaper than cure, it is also another way of attracting and retaining talented staff," he said.

Generation Y in particular want to work for organisations that have a culture of caring for their staff beyond salary alone."

A recent Australian study by Medibank Private backs up this trend. It revealed that healthy employees are three times more productive than their unhealthy counterparts.

One of Pro-Fit's most recent clients is law firm Farrar Gesini Dunn. Managing partner Jim Dunn said he initially underestimated the positive effect Pro-Fit could have on his firm. "Not only did they provide individual health appraisals, but they also incorpor-

ated the needs of all staff when creating the greater health program. Overall, Pro-Fit has energised the atmosphere at our firm," Mr Dunn said.

Mr Males said many government departments are now realising that reactive expenses such as compensation claims, absenteeism costs and workplace injury can now be prevented through a systemised, proactive approach.

"In the past, corporate health has been about doing what's trendy. We now provide a system that provides tailored solutions to companies and department health needs," he said.

For more information about corporate health programs to suit your office, phone 6291 5902 or go to www.pfcorporatehealth.com



Inaugural congress sheds light on workplace health

Good Health Solutions (GHS) is delighted to be the platinum sponsor of Australia's 1st Annual Health and Productivity Management Congress.

The Health and Productivity Management Congress is an opportunity for participants to learn about current trends and recent data from the best of the Australian and International authorities, such as Dr Harris Allen, PhD, lecturer at the Department of Health Policy at Yale School of Medicine, Sean Sullivan, president and CEO for Institute for Health and Productivity Management, US, and Sue Adams world wide manager, Health and Productivity Intel case study: Making Health and Productivity Management a Global Business Strategy.

Good Health Solutions managing director Dr John Lang will be presenting one of the keynote addresses on the first day of the congress. He will be releasing and discussing the recent data collated from the GHS Inaugural Australian

Health, Absence and Productivity Survey. This research explores the numerous work and non-work related drivers of absence and productivity losses in the Australian business environment. This research is sure to grab the attention of those attending. It combines aspects of physical, psychosocial, cultural and other determinants of absence and productivity loss, which have until now been treated in isolation.



Our high level of involvement in this conference is reflective of our commitment to the ongoing development and delivery of innovative, accountable and outcome focused health promotion programs that return real results to individuals and their companies.

For further information, visit www.goodhealthsolutions.com.au or contact Andrew Hedley in Sydney on (02) 9356 0809 or Marita Slattery in Melbourne on (03) 8656 0204



Fighting fit at work

Australians are spending more time at work, which often results in limited physical activity, higher stress levels and poorer eating habits. **Teresa Russell** looks at two organisations that have taken steps to reverse these effects throughout their workplaces, with impressive results

Figures released 18 months ago by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare should be etched into every OHS and HR director's brain. In its paper, *Obesity and Workplace Absenteeism Among Older Australians*, it concluded that obese workers are 17 per cent more likely to be absent from work due to personal illness or injury than non-obese workers, and for a longer time when they are. Absenteeism related to illness or injury associated with obesity may account for over 4 million lost workdays each year.

A subsequent report, *Chronic Diseases and Associated Risk Factors in Australia, 2006*, shows that Australians are not doing enough to guard against chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and arthritis. Specifically it says that more than 85 per cent of adults are not consuming enough vegetables; almost 50 per cent of adults are not consuming enough fruit; about 54 per cent of Australians are either overweight or obese; and around 21 per cent of adults smoke tobacco.

Many organisations have started to help their

staff achieve a level of health and wellbeing that will ensure they don't develop either acute or chronic conditions that will affect their quality of life. Some do it because they care, while others have purely cost-driven reasons. Regardless of the motivation, employees benefit when organisations introduce corporate health and fitness programs.

The State Transit Authority of New South Wales is a government-owned authority responsible for the operation of Sydney and Newcastle buses and ferries. It services more than 200 million passengers every year and operates 1,900 buses – the largest fleet in Australia.

Centrelink is a Federal Government statutory agency, working under the Department of Human Services. Its mission is to help people become self-sufficient and support those in need. It provides \$63 billion in payments to over 6.5 million customers each year. Its division in western Victoria employs 1,200 people in five metropolitan and 15 regional offices. Its diverse range of staff includes customer service advisers, social workers, psychologists,





occupational therapists, and a corporate support team including HR and workplace health.

Staff suggestions

Both State Transit and Centrelink in western Victoria introduced a Weight Watchers at Work program as a result of staff suggestions. State Transit's CEO, John Lee says that in 2004, staff members at its Ryde bus depot (in Sydney) asked for a program to help them on their way to a healthier lifestyle. Since then, State Transit staff has lost 1,550 kilograms – the equivalent of 26 bus tyres is how they like to measure it! Tanya Lynch, Centrelink's western Victoria OHS adviser says that the suggestion came from several people through this year's staff poll on health and wellbeing.

"We have a workplace health plan that is reviewed regularly. It includes health promotion activities; injury management strategies to support people through workplace injury; including early intervention and prevention strategies. We usually run three to four health promotion activities per year, so the Weight Watchers at Work program fitted nicely into that offering," says Lynch.

Other programs at Centrelink have included pedometer challenges; ride to work and walk to work days with healthy breakfasts; seminars on winter wellness, healthy eating, office workstation ergonomics and back care; as well as flu injections every winter.

How it works

Lynch says that after receiving the suggestions, she contacted Weight Watchers at Work who then ran information sessions at a couple of sites to see if there was enough interest to start a group. There was, and the program started the following week. "We currently have 56 staff participating in the first 13-week block of meetings at five sites. Some of our sites are very small, so they don't have the critical mass required to start a meeting there. Weight Watchers added staff from these offices on to the end of their usual community meetings, so they could still participate," she says.

At Centrelink, each person pays for the meetings themselves. The rate is lower than the normal community meetings. It is also far more convenient, because meetings are held at work during either a scheduled lunch or morning tea break. Participants also have an email support group.

State Transit has chosen to provide a healthy incentive to its staff by paying for half the cost of the program. Over the last three years more than 200 people across all the depots have gone through the program. There are currently 10 depots running

weekly meetings "around the normal working duties of staff".

Success stories

There is nothing more motivating than weight loss success stories and State Transit has a bundle of them. A Newcastle bus operator couple, Steve Solovieff and Karen Griffith have lost more than 100 kilograms between them. Bus operator Lisa Marquette received national recognition for her efforts after being named Weight Watchers 2006 Australian Slimmer of the Year in her weight loss division. "I am so happy with my weight loss and my doctor has told me that as well as no longer needing to take high blood pressure medication, I have reduced my chances of getting diabetes by 25 per cent. I am also sleeping a lot better," says Marquette.

Slimmers at its Port Botany depot have shed almost 400 kilograms in total. They have recently installed a George Forman grill in the meal room and purchased a set of electronic scales that measures weight and body mass index.

"The healthy initiatives that are happening within the depots have resulted in many positive outcomes, such as morale and teamwork. Staff members also got to meet new people [through the meetings]," says Lee. Other benefits reported following weight loss have included easier movement, being less out of breath, reduced back pain and higher energy levels. Many employees have also been able to come off long-term medication for diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol.

Lynch says that in just its ninth week, Centrelink's program can already boast some successes. "A few people have already reached their goal weight; one person has lost 9 kilograms and another is going to the gym every second day. They are just beaming," she says.

"Weight Watchers at Work, works. It has been so much easier to attend the meetings and keep motivated with workmates. It's also fantastic to see smiles on a lot of the participants' faces. Although I haven't lost a huge amount of weight yet, I have learnt some valuable lessons," says Raelene, rehabilitation case manager at Centrelink.

Key to successful programs

Lynch says that it is important to have a coordinated approach with health and fitness programs, as well as support from the management team. She says there is no use introducing programs without getting feedback from staff first about what they are interested in. "Make sure that once you start programs, they are not forgotten. Ensure there is a review process at the conclusion," she advises.



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Peak Health Management. Recent health screenings and staff surveys conducted by Peak Health Management, Australia's leading corporate health management company, have identified startling results about the health status of corporate employees. A significant finding is that "stress" is becoming a, if not the, most significant corporate health issue today. As the corporate pressure cooker bubbles, sacrifices are made to keep company wheels churning. The working week has been stretched to its limit creating a work-life imbalance, as 'work' time oozes into 'life' time. Peak has the tools to identify and apply corrective strategies to curb this and many other health risks conducive to any workplace. Contact Peak today for our professional assistance on 1300 360 107 or via the web www.peakhealth.com.au.

University of Sydney. How do workplaces foster a culture and practices which engage and motivate while guarding against overwork and stress? Our conference will investigate the level of happiness in workplaces and the influence this has on the wellbeing of employees. Some of Australia's leading experts on psychology, leadership and workplace relations will provide strategies that will allow the mindful leader to create solutions for generating increased productivity through the dominant value of employee wellbeing. These seminars and workshops will be interactive and participants will take away ideas and techniques they can apply immediately in the workplace. See page 19 for more information or to book online go to www.wrc.org.au or call 1800 260 864.

Ford Health is an innovative, client focused corporate health provider committed to improving the health and effectiveness of working people. Since the late 1980s, our founders have played a leading role in the development of corporate health programs across Australia. Utilising up to date, preventative medical and research based methods; our unique programs deliver positive outcomes and real change. These programs include: executive level assessments; onsite managers and team assessments; health presentations; flu vaccinations; and program design, evaluation and management. Our aim is to help employees identify and address their own health risks and receive the support to make lasting change. See the back page for further information.

