

How wellness can work for small companies

Written by Garth Jansen, president, Employee Wellness Solutions Network on Tuesday, July 16th, 2013 at 1:32 pm



Do your clients, like many others, think their company is just too small for an employee wellness program? Wellness—and its long-term benefits—is for every-sized company. From small, privately owned companies to the fortune 500 companies, a comprehensive wellness program can create impact from morale and energy in the workplace to lowering absenteeism, health claims and even retaining and attracting top employees.

Employee Wellness Solutions Network specializes in employee wellness program design, implementation, and evaluation within smaller organizations. While participation in larger organizations may yield good

engagement (from 10-30%), EWSNetwork's experience has seen 40-80% participation in individual initiatives, like wellness consultations/health coaching, and upwards of 80-95% engagement within the overall program offerings.

Read: [Health habits suffer when work and financial stress is high](#)

There are a few reasons for these high participation/engagement rates:

1. **Residual-Impact:** Co-workers see others eating better, exercising more, practicing new habits, or taking advice from the on-site health coach. This positive energy can be encouraging to others. In a larger organization, these newly formed activities tend to get lost, and not noticed as much, within the day-to-day operations.
2. **Friendly competition:** Smaller organizations typically occupy smaller spaces so often some friendly competition within group challenges and incentive campaigns can be healthy for behavioural change. In this case, a little peer pressure isn't a bad thing!
3. **The buzz:** News can travel quickly in a smaller workplace. If a wellness program is positioned correctly, mostly everyone wants to get in on the action. Therefore, results are attained more quickly than in larger organizations due to faster engagement.

The best way to achieve success with an employee wellness program is working any chosen initiative into an overall strategic plan within the organization. Some of the components may include an organizational audit consisting mainly of getting employees to complete a Health Risk Assessment (HRA), outlining objectives and indicating the main health cost drivers of the organization.

Read: [Employees consider health, wellness when choosing employer](#)

Advisors can assist in building the strategic plan by actively participating in gathering the necessary baseline information. More specifically, costs associated with health claims, drugs, paramedicals, extended benefits, and any others costs associated with the organization. Helping organizations see trends over a period of a few years can also help decision makers understand the impact wellness can make over time.

Strategically aligning the program design to address the results of the HRA, offering programs to support employee interests, and ensuring employee and management objectives are met, all contribute to a healthy return on investment. Here are a couple of examples:

1. An organization with 55 lives, spread over three offices, in two different provinces has been working

with EWSNetwork for the past year and a half. In that short time, drug costs have lowered while paramedicals have increased, health claims have stabilized, and health risks have lowered. This smaller organization continues to experience upwards of 70% participation and over 80% engagement within the wellness program.

2. An organization with just over 100 lives, spread over 8 offices, in two different countries has also been working with EWSNetwork over the past year. Similar trends have been seen with lowered health claims, reduced health risks, personal success stories shared within the office over social media and average sick time has even lowered by two days.

A successful, results-based corporate wellness plan offers various programs with the underlying objective of true behavioural change.

To have the biggest impact, a comprehensive approach should include a healthy balance focusing on the individual and implementing group and awareness programs suitable to target the widest range of the population. Evaluative measures can be suggested to organizations via feedback surveys, participation data, peer-driven wellness committees, and tracking trends in the main cost drivers. If additional assistance is needed, advisors can also recommend the expertise of a third-party vendor.

Starting a wellness program is the most important thing. It can fit into any sized budget. One-offs like the odd lunch n' learn or health fair end up lending very little lasting impact. However, following a strategic plan, with targeted wellness initiatives, has lasting effects and subsequent results.

The employee wellness industry is growing because it's easy to see a return on better health. Sometimes, higher returns on investments are realized in smaller organizations. The more programs offered to encourage lasting behaviour change and a healthy culture, the healthier the return will be. Healthy employees simply cost less.

Read: [Get unhealthy employees to use wellness programs](#)